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**“Historian of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Life and Ideas
of Christopher H. Dawson, 1889-1970”**

by

Stephen G. Carter

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**Department of Theology and Religion
Durham University**

Doctor of Philosophy

2006

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**'Historian of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Life
and Ideas of Christopher H. Dawson, 1889-1970'**

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Stephen Graham Carter

Abstract

What follows is an intellectual biography of the English Catholic historian Christopher Henry Dawson (1889-1970). If there is one overarching thesis to this dissertation, it is that Dawson's place within the history of Britain and the United States, and within the historical academy in general has been hitherto underappreciated as a result of unfair categorization of his work by critics, and equally unhelpful credulous assessments and subsequent politicization of his scholarship by overzealous admirers. Even though his perspectives will probably never be completely embraced by the historical academy due to current trends in historiography, it is hoped that this dissertation will demonstrate that Dawson's scholarship is deserving of study because of the breadth of his intellectual and practical activity in Britain during the twentieth century, and his groundbreaking role in identifying the importance of culture and religious belief to historiography.

The introduction includes a review of the most important secondary literature about Dawson that will be used throughout the work. The main text of the dissertation develops chronologically, and is in eight parts, each part representing a distinct phase of Dawson's life. Part One (1889-1914) examines the formative years of his childhood, his education, his conversion to the Roman Catholic Church, and how his experiences formed the basis for his opinions about history, religion, and world around him. Part Two (1915-1929) explores the schools of thought that shaped Dawson's ideas as a young scholar, and the ideas expressed in his first two books. Part Three (1930-1934) represents the most active time of Dawson's career, and the period during which he became a widely read Catholic intellectual and historian of Europe. Part Four (1935-1939) examines Dawson's commentaries on European political movements during the 1930s. Part Five (1940-1945) discusses Dawson's role as the vice-president of the wartime ecumenical movement 'The Sword of the Spirit', as well as his book written at the height of the Movement's success. Part Six (1946-1952) covers Dawson's ideas from his Gifford Lectures, and his interest in American Catholicism. Part Seven (1953-1962) covers Dawson's vision for American Catholics and education, and his position at Harvard University, which he held from 1958 until a series of strokes forced him to retire, and return to England in 1962. Part Eight (1963-1970) briefly discussed the events of the last years of his life. The conclusion serves as a summary of his contribution and legacy as a major twentieth-century intellectual.

Declaration and Copyright

Declaration

No part of this thesis has previously been submitted by the candidate for a degree in this or any other university. The thesis conforms with the prescribed word length for the degree which I am submitting it for examination.

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Acknowledgements

A major project such as this one would have been impossible without the careful and watchful supervision of Dr. Sheridan Gilley, who was most kind to continue as my supervisor even after his retirement from an admirable career in the Department of Theology at the University of Durham. I am grateful for his sound advice about the structure of this dissertation, and his patience with the many 'Americanisms' that plagued my prose. Many thanks as well to Dr. Alison Forrestal from the Department of Theology at Durham University and Professor Eamon Duffy from the Department of Theology at Cambridge University for their willingness to serve as my examiners. I am indebted to my colleagues at Atlantic Baptist University, in particular Dr. Julie Sutherland, Dr. Carol Thorne, Dr. Greg Maillet, Professor Graeme Ching, Dr. Douglas Mantz, Dr. Robert Williams, Dr. Dennis Bustin, and Dr. Daniel Goodwin, all of whom have either read the proofs or supported me through words of encouragement. I should also express my gratitude to the many historians whose works have helped me develop and write this dissertation. Thank you for letting me stand on your shoulders.

There are also many people in my life outside the strange world of academia who know or care little about either the ideas of Christopher Dawson or nineteenth- and twentieth-century English Catholicism, but who have played an important role in the success of this project. I am blessed with wonderful family members and friends who have been constant sources of strength, and who have



endured random and seemingly meaningless anecdotes about Dawson and the history of modern Britain. Enough cannot be said to express my gratitude and love for my wife Cheryl who married me during the writing of this dissertation, in spite of knowing that commitment to me meant a provisional commitment to Christopher Dawson. If there could be anyone happier than myself to see the completion of this project, it would be her. Lastly, I would like to express my thankfulness and my utmost respect for my brother David who saw the genesis of this dissertation but who is not here to see its completion. It is to his memory that I dedicate this work.

Abbreviations

AG: *Age of the Gods*
BP: *Beyond Politics*
CEC: *Christianity and European Culture*
CWE: *Crisis of Western Education*
DC: *The Dividing of Christendom*
DWH: *Dynamics of World History*
ERC: *Enquiries into Religion and Culture*
FC: *The Formation of Christendom*
GR: *The Gods of Revolution*
HRCC: *Historic Reality of Christian Culture*
JON: *The Judgment of the Nations*
MA: *Mission to Asia*
MD: *The Modern Dilemma*
ME: *Medieval Essays*
MOE: *The Making of Europe*
MR: *Medieval Religion*
MWR: *Movement of World Revolution*
PR: *Progress and Religion*
RA: *Revolt of Asia*
RC: *Religion and Culture*
RMS: *Religion and the Modern State*
RRWC: *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*
RWH: *Religion and World History*
SOM: *Spirit of the Oxford Movement*
UE: *Understanding Europe*

UNDA: University of Notre Dame Archives
USTA: University of St. Thomas Archives
WCA: Westminster Diocesan Archives

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Preface

I was first introduced to the writings of Christopher Dawson in a historical methods course during my sophomore year of undergraduate study. In my preliminary research for the project, I faithfully observed E. H. Carr's challenge to study the historian before you study his historiography.¹ Although Carr's exhortation is wise, such a practice before a reading of the historian's work can unfortunately lead to undue generalization of the historian and unfair categorization of his work. Such was my initial error with Dawson. When I set out to analyse his life and career for this project I had already relegated both him and his historiography to the realm of that academic wasteland of metahistory. His vision of history was too polemical to be taken seriously and, frankly, too informed by a Catholic worldview for my Protestant convictions. In the months and years that followed I was forced to dismantle these presumptions and be more honest about the value of his scholarship and the perspective which informed it.

In the conclusion to my project I noted that Dawson was a man both before and after his time. After four years of further analysis of his life and ideas, I believe this more than ever. My observation was later confirmed by a scholar who

¹ E. H. Carr, *What is History?* 2nd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1981), 12-14.

noted that ‘Dawson does not seem of his time at all.’² Admittedly, this may be a result of *when* he was writing just as much as *what* he wrote. This was brought to my attention in 2002 when a fellow graduate student at the University of Durham raised what I felt to be an astute yet personally vexing observation that those who had the misfortune to be intellectuals between the World Wars were not taken very seriously today. Little did I know at the time of the truth behind his observation. Upon choosing to complete my doctoral dissertation on Dawson, I not only lamented the dearth of information about Dawson himself but also the seeming lack of interest in twentieth-century English Catholicism. The late Adrian Hastings, who was one of the foremost – and sadly one of the few – scholars of twentieth-century Catholicism in England, observed that English Catholicism in the 1930s had the misfortune of ‘falling into oblivion.’³ If I may take Hastings’ observation further, it seems as though the whole century of English Catholic history has fallen into oblivion. When one considers the volumes of undergraduate papers, graduate dissertations, and books that have been written about the period, this absence of scholarship is even more perplexing. Coming from a non-Catholic perspective, I was puzzled by the lack of interest among Catholics not only in Dawson but his era in general. It was not long into this dissertation that I began to understand fully what often referred to as the ‘condescension of posterity’ about Dawson and his English Catholic contemporaries. Consider for example what one Catholic author wrote in the introduction to the latest reprint of Thomas Merton’s *The Seven Storey Mountain* about Merton’s pre-Vatican II Catholicism:

²Dermot Quinn, “Catholic Idea of History” in Morrill and Caldecott (eds.), *Eternity in Time* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 85.

³Adrian Hastings, “Some reflexions on the English Catholicism of the late 1930s” in Garrett Sweeney (ed.), *Bishops and Writers* (Wheathampstead: Anthony Clarke, 1977) 107.

The Roman Catholic Church you encounter in this book is almost light years removed from the church that we recognize as the Roman Catholic Church today. At the time Merton wrote his book, Roman Catholic theology had become a set of prepackaged responses to any and all questions. Polemical and apologetic in tone, its aim was to prove that Catholics were right and all others wrong. Today, fifty years removed from this rigid ecclesial atmosphere, it may be difficult to identify with ... Merton's enthusiastic acceptance of the church's triumphalist mentality. Readers today will be better able to put this narrowness into historical perspective and thus be less bothered by it.⁵

Dawson may not have been completely innocent of a triumphalist approach, but his response was certainly not 'prepackaged.' As a lay leader in the English Catholic Church, under the guidance of Cardinal Arthur Hinsley, he encouraged co-operation as a means to create a basis for unity among all Christians. The irony here is that the success of Dawson and his Catholic contemporaries during this period was a direct result of this anti-modern stand that emphasized the timeless authority of the Church in contrast with the disorder around them in the spheres of politics and secular culture.⁶ Efforts such as this to create a strong sense of 'before' and 'after' reveal a tendency among Catholic historians to look condescendingly upon this era of their history.

It is my hope that this survey of Dawson's life and ideas will be a catalyst for further study of his ideas and the related figures and themes readers will encounter. Although he was a Catholic, further study of him and his ideas should by no means be confined to Catholic graduate students and academics, as his perspective transcended denominational boundaries. For historians in general, he is an important historian whose career spans much of the twentieth century during the

⁵William H. Shannon, "A Note to the Reader" in the Fiftieth Anniversary Edition publication of Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1998), xx-xxi.

⁶For an excellent summary of anti-modernism as a catalyst for numerical and intellectual growth in American and British Catholicism see Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals turn to Rome* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

crises of two world wars, economic collapse, the Cold War and general questions about the historical profession. The jury is still out concerning historical inquiry and its limits as well as the nature of the historian's task. Thus, there remains much to be discovered and discussed about Dawson's place in this debate.

Such is my hope for this dissertation. It is also my wish that it will be often revisited, thoroughly reviewed and possibly reproved by those who read it. If the pedagogical ideal of the Socratic method is to be achieved, one must be willing to stand corrected. Future generations will be better off because of it.

Introduction and Review of Literature

Christopher Henry Dawson (1889-1970) was, for much of the twentieth century, a leading Catholic historian and intellectual.¹ During his forty-two year career as a writer, lecturer, editor, and eventually Professor at Harvard University, he was a remarkably prolific author, publishing close to thirty books and over 150 articles. Although his books are virtually unknown today, during his lifetime he could boast a large reading audience in Europe and North America and to a lesser extent in countries throughout Asia and South America. Frankly Catholic in his approach to history, social issues, and politics, he nevertheless championed ecumenical endeavours and could boast a readership with a wide variety of perspectives, Catholic and Protestant, Christian and non-Christian. T. S. Eliot – a High Churchman – acclaimed Dawson as the most influential intellectual in Britain in the 1930s.² In a letter to Dawson, the historian Lewis Mumford wrote that he followed Dawson's writings with 'so much pleasure and profit.'³ William Inge,

¹Of course, it is virtually impossible to gauge how many of his contemporaries believed this to be true. However, an overwhelming majority of the reviews and articles which considered Dawson's ideas, explicitly or implicitly, make this claim. Even those reviewers who held little or no agreement with him would often introduce him as a leading Catholic intellectual.

²Christina Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 210.

³Mumford to Dawson, 8 May 1934 quoted in Adam Schwartz, 'Third Spring: Roman Catholic Conversion and Rebellion Against Modernity in the Thought of G. K. Chesterton, Graham Greene, Christopher Dawson and David Jones' (Northwestern University: PhD dissertation, unpublished, 1996), 732.

England's 'Gloomy Dean,' was also an avid reader of Dawson's works and claimed that Dawson was the only Catholic author he could tolerate.⁴ His tutor at Oxford, Sir Ernest Barker, claimed that Dawson was by far his best student and 'a man and a scholar of the same sort of quality as Acton and von Hügel.'⁵ H. A. L. Fisher noted that Dawson's perspective was 'admirable', and claimed that his 'learning was under strict control, and [the] arrangement [of his scholarship was] a model of lucidity and force.'⁶ In the 1940s Dawson had the singular honour of delivering the Gifford Lectures, placing him in the same company as R. H. Niebuhr and William James. In the 1950s, he was offered a Professorship at Harvard University where he held the position until illness forced him to retire in 1962. Yet his readership was not only among intellectuals. When subscribers to the journal *America* were asked in 1936 by Francis Talbot to select Catholic authors to be included in the 'Permanent Gallery of Living Catholic Authors,' the readers chose Dawson along with other noteworthy literary figures such as John Henry Cardinal Newman, G. K. Chesterton, and Ronald Knox.⁷

What follows is an introduction to Dawson's life and ideas. An intellectual biography of his life which attempts to explore developments in his career and ideas, as well as place them within a greater context of changes in the intellectual climate of the twentieth century, has yet to be written. With a few exceptions – all of which will be discussed below – the bulk of the secondary material on Dawson

⁴Scott, *Historian*, 90.

⁵Sir Ernest Barker quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 110.

⁶H. A. L. Fisher to Sir Walter Moberly, quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 109.

⁷Francis X. Talbot, 'Results of Voting on Catholic Authors,' *America*, 56 (10 October 1936): 18-19. See Arnold Sparr, *To Promote, Defend, and Redeem: The Catholic Literary Revival and the Cultural Transformation of American Catholicism, 1920-1960* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 22-6.

approaches his views thematically, rather than chronologically, or as merely part of a more general subject such as the Catholic intellectual revival and the 'Sword of the Spirit Movement.'⁸ Christina Scott's biography of her father, while offering a serviceable glimpse into Dawson's life is, by its very nature, a biography rather than an analysis of his books and of the development of his ideas.⁹ Since its publication in 1987, there has been a slow but steady increase in secondary material in the form of dissertations, articles, books and chapters of books, all of which have more or less proved enlightening in their explanation of Dawson's ideas. Presently, a significant number of his books are being republished in an attempt to make his ideas accessible to a posterity that is unfamiliar with his achievements. It is therefore time, I believe, to bring together the various insights of the past two decades in order to write this much-needed introductory work to these ideas.

At the outset, however, it must be made clear that this study does not presume to be complete either in its biographical content, or in its analysis of bibliographical material. Indeed, as one author has noted recently, such a study would be virtually impossible in a single volume due to the depth and breadth of Dawson's ideas.¹⁰ Yet if Dawson is to be taken seriously as a major twentieth-century British intellectual and historian, a work such as the present one is sorely needed, even if, by its very nature, it may be vulnerable to generalization and repetition, both of which can more easily be avoided in a thematic study. The

⁸The exceptions include John Mulloy's *Continuity and Development in the Thought of Christopher Dawson*. This essay is a postscript to Christopher Dawson, *Dynamics of World History* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956), a work that Mulloy edited.

⁹See footnote 2 for a complete citation.

¹⁰Jonathon Reyes, 'Christopher Dawson and the Renewal of Christian Culture' (University of Notre Dame: PhD dissertation, unpublished, 1994), 1.

present work is above all, as I have said above, an attempt to reintroduce to future historians and theologians a man who has clearly played a significant role in the cultural life of twentieth-century Britain and the United States, even if aspects of his methodology appear dated in an era of specialization and compartmentalized disciplines.

As a general rule, the structure and development of the present study is provided by each of Dawson's books as they appeared in chronological order throughout his career. Of course with any intellectual biography, a consideration of context is vital to a proper understanding of the individual's ideas. I have therefore attempted to weave what I believe is relevant biographical information into what he was writing and saying. Because of the extensive literature produced by Dawson as well as the plethora of organizations with which he was involved, I have chosen to offer a more general survey of many of the issues and related events.

Both the nature and aims of Dawson's 'calling' lead to a perspective and view of history that had been formulated even before he began to write. He was obviously influenced by the passage of time and events, all of which created nuances in his thought, the most obvious being the impact of Britain's involvement in the Second World War on his treatment of democracy. Wherever possible, I have attempted to make these nuances known when I believe they are clearest. Moreover, his participation in the 'Catholic Intellectual Revival' and 'The Sword of the Spirit Movement' were just as vital to the development of his ideas as his books themselves. These two movements are therefore integrated into the general development of the study.

For organizational purposes and the sake of accessibility, I have broken down Dawson's career into what I believe are eight distinct phases or parts,

because I think that they represent individual dispensations with unique characteristics that appear to have both a beginning and a conclusion. The first phase covers the years between 1889 and 1914 and highlights his personal and intellectual development leading up to his conversion to Catholicism several months before the onset of the First World War. These twenty-five years are marked by Dawson's intense insecurity and his passionate enmity towards the modern world, both of which were responsible for a period of personal solipsism followed by an intense search for authority which led him to the Roman Catholic Church. The second phase – 1915 to 1929 – considers his idea of history and how it was moulded by his theological convictions as well as the fruit of almost a decade of intensive historical and sociological studies, highlighting the obvious links to nineteenth-century historicism and twentieth-century schools of anthropology, sociology and ethnology. During this – the most important period for understanding his approach to history, since it was during this time that he did most of his research – Dawson wrote two books: *The Age of the Gods* (1928) and *Progress and Religion* (1929).¹¹ It was during the third phase, covering roughly the years between 1930 and 1934, that he became widely renowned among his contemporaries, not only among Catholics but also among non-Catholic English and American scholars as well. One reason for this was his change of publishers from John Murray Publishing to the more widely known Sheed and Ward.¹² Although his first two books were successful in their own right, it was his partnership with Peter Wust and Jacques Maritain in the series *Essays in Order*

¹¹Christopher Dawson, *The Age of the Gods: A Study in the Origins of Culture in Prehistoric Europe and the Ancient East* (1928; New York: Howard Fertig Inc., 1970); *Progress and Religion* (1929; New York: Image Books, 1960).

¹²Sheed and Ward would remain the primary publisher of Dawson's work late into the 1950s and owned the rights to his books for decades after.

(1930-1935), published by Sheed and Ward, that attracted a more general reading audience. In addition to the books *Christianity and the New Age* (1931) and *The Modern Dilemma* (1932), both published as part of the *Order* series, Dawson published four other books including *The Making of Europe* (1932), *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement* (1933), *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (1933), and *Mediaeval Religion and Other Essays* (1934), all of which were published independently of the *Order* series and were reviewed favourably by those who read them.¹³ The books also established him as a respected scholar of European history, making his interwar ideas of great importance not only as primary material, but as secondary texts as well.

The fourth phase (1934-1939) represents a shift in approach, as he moved from works of history to works in which he provided a commentary on the charged political atmosphere of the mid-1930s. Through these books, Dawson attempted to outline a distinctly Catholic response to political ideologies such as totalitarianism, communism, and liberal democracy by employing the teachings of papal encyclicals such as *Rerum Novarum*, *Quas Primas* and *Quadragesima Anno*, among others. The result was a large number of articles devoted to the social and political positions of the Church, as well as two very controversial and often misunderstood books, *Religion and the Modern State* (1935) and *Beyond Politics* (1939).¹⁴ In spite of being labelled an enemy of democracy, and considered pro-fascist in sympathy, Dawson's reputation rebounded in the fifth phase (1940-

¹³ Christopher Dawson, *Christianity and the New Age* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1931); hereafter *CNA*. *The Modern Dilemma* (1932; London: Sheed and Ward, 1933); hereafter *MD*. *The Making of Europe* (1932; Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004); hereafter *MOE*. *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1933); hereafter *SOM*. *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1933); hereafter *ERC*.

¹⁴ Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1945); hereafter *RMS*. *Beyond Politics* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1939); hereafter *BP*.

1945). This 'return to grace' was underscored by an invitation by the Archbishop of Westminster, Arthur Cardinal Hinsley to be the vice-president of the 'Sword of the Spirit Movement', one of the first ecumenical initiatives in which English Catholics were involved. This phase produced only one book, *The Judgement of the Nations*, a rallying cry for Christian unity and the formation of small groups of Christians to produce a fresh outpouring of 'spiritual energy.'¹⁵ Although the movement itself proved to be a failure for the ecumenical aspirations of many English Catholics, Dawson's leadership was one of the primary factors leading to the University of Edinburgh's request to him to deliver the prestigious Gifford Lectures for the years 1946 and 1947, the first two years of what may be seen as the sixth phase.

Lasting from 1946 to 1954, the sixth phase contains a significant shift in Dawson's thought. During the 'reconstructive' years following the Second World War, he, like many other intellectuals, became absorbed in the idea of renewal through education. His opinions on education would prove to be as controversial as his political views in the 1930s. Moreover, this phase represents a revolution in Dawson's thought on themes that dominated his articles and books during the 1920s. Even though the relationship between religion and culture had been a consistent theme in his books into the 1930s and 1940s, not since *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (1933) had he attempted to approach the connections between religion and culture from his original sociological point of reference. In the Gifford series he did exactly this and subsequently published the lectures as *Religion and Culture* (1948) and *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*

¹⁵ Christopher Dawson, *The Judgement of the Nations* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1942); hereafter *JON*.

(1950).¹⁶ In spite of the unwillingness of many among the younger generation of historians such as Hugh Trevor-Roper to accept Dawson's thesis that religion is the most important feature in a 'living culture', the lectures were declared a success by those who attended them and by those who read the proceedings. In the following years, Dawson returned to writing about Europe and its history, and published *Understanding Europe* (1952) and *Medieval Essays* (1954).¹⁷

It was during the seventh phase of Dawson's life (1955-1962) that there is a clear divergence among Catholics about Dawson's ideas about history and his recommendations for cultural renewal in the Western world, leading to a declining readership in Europe and, in contrast, a growing one in the United States. It was through the influence of an American named John Mulloy that Dawson saw the incredible possibilities in the United States for cultural renewal, especially in the vast number of Catholic colleges and universities. Consequently, this phase of his life witnessed a shift in both his attention and sphere of influence away from Europe to the Americas. Unfortunately for Dawson, his recommendations for Catholic higher education proved to be as controversial as his political views in the 1930s. There were many Catholics and non-Catholics who saw his historical approach as too outmoded and generalized to be taken seriously. In response, Dawson published several important articles on metahistory, many of which were republished in one of his most well-known books, *Dynamics of World History* (1956).¹⁸ Fittingly, at the age of 77, Dawson was asked to be the first holder of the

¹⁶ Christopher Dawson, *Religion and Culture* (1948; New York: Meridian Books, 1958); hereafter *RC* Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (1950; New York: Image Books, 1991); hereafter *RRWC*.

¹⁷ Christopher Dawson, *Understanding Europe* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1952); hereafter *UE*. *Medieval Essays* (1954; New York: Image Books, 1959); hereafter *ME*.

¹⁸ Christopher Dawson, *Dynamics of World History* (1956; New York: Mentor Omega Books, 1962); hereafter *DWH*.

Stillman Chair of Catholic Studies at Harvard University. While at Harvard, Dawson wrote several books: *The Movement of World Revolution* (1959), *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture* (1960), and *The Crisis of Western Education* (1961).¹⁹ His career ended in 1962 when he retired and returned to England with his wife after suffering a debilitating stroke. Other books during this period include *Mission to Asia*, originally published as *The Mongol Mission* (1955) and *The Revolt of Asia* (1957), both of which reveal his growing concern with nationalism in Asia in the post-World War Two era, and his challenge to the Western countries to take the lead in a global organization which would supersede the United Nations.²⁰

During the eighth and final phase of his life (1963-1970), his lectures from Harvard were published as *The Dividing of Christendom* (1965) and *The Formation of Christendom* (1967).²¹ In spite of this post-career publishing activity, Dawson was able to do very little in the final years of his life because of his strokes. He died on Trinity Sunday, 1970.

I have already mentioned that Dawson's work attracted a significant amount of attention from his contemporaries, especially theological leaders in the United States and England. Whenever a book was published it was reviewed in a wide variety of newspapers, magazines, and journals such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The London Times*, *The New York Times*,

¹⁹Christopher Dawson, *The Movement of World Revolution* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1959); hereafter *MWR*. *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960); hereafter *HRCC*. *America and the Secularization of Modern Culture* (Houston: University of St. Thomas Press, 1960); hereafter *ASMC*. *The Crisis of Western Education* (1961; New York: Image Books, 1965); hereafter *CWE*.

²⁰Christopher Dawson, *Mission to Asia* [The Mongol Mission] (1956; Harper and Row, 1966); hereafter *MA*. *The Revolt of Asia* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1957); hereafter *RA*.

²¹Christopher Dawson, *The Dividing of Christendom* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965); hereafter *DC*. *The Formation of Christendom* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967); hereafter *FC*.

and *The Guardian*, as well as many theological journals and periodicals.²²

Generally speaking, the majority of the reviews praised Dawson for his breadth of knowledge and the brilliant originality of his approach to themes such as the Middle Ages and Culture. Even more favoured by readers was his 'Chestertonian' ability to analyse and strike to the heart of contemporary issues. Quite often, his opinions were as controversial as they were critical.

The first significant attempt to analyse in retrospect a particular development in Dawson's thought was a dissertation completed at the University of Notre Dame by Bruno Schlesinger.²³ Entitled 'Christopher Dawson and the Political Crisis', the project was intended to be a kind gesture in order to prove to readers that Dawson had changed his mind from an acceptance of Italian Fascism to a moderate democratic position during the war. Schlesinger concluded that Dawson 'attempts to present fascism as a constructive political and social movement' since he was 'convinced of the impending breakdown of the nineteenth-century order of democracy and capitalism.'²⁴ Moreover, he believed that Dawson viewed 'Fascism as the ascendancy of a new social order fitted to the needs of the twentieth century.'²⁵ After completing the dissertation, Schlesinger sent a copy to Dawson. Instead of appreciating it as a 'charitable recognition' of his changed views, Dawson was openly upset with Schlesinger's accusations and sought to clarify his own position as well as highlight the graduate student's

²² A comprehensive list of these reviews is provided at the end of this dissertation.

²³ Bruno Schlesinger, 'Christopher Dawson and the Political Crisis' (University of Notre Dame, PhD dissertation, unpublished, 1949).

²⁴ Schlesinger, 12.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

‘misinterpretation.’²⁶ In a letter to Schlesinger late in 1949, he retorted that ‘on the political side you have seriously misinterpreted my thought by failing to grasp the unity of my thought on the key issues of secularization, totalitarianism and democracy ... [and] what is more serious is that you have taken my exposition of the case for totalitarianism for my own view of it.’²⁷ In the end, then, he believed Schlesinger had failed to consider the wider context in which his political views were expressed. Yet there is a considerable amount of excellent insight in this work which has recently been highly criticized by authors who attempt to show the consistency in Dawson’s thought. Schlesinger was able to draw out nuances and indeed changes in Dawson’s political philosophy that the most recent study of Dawson has downplayed or ignored altogether.

In 1956, John Mulloy, an American high school teacher and friend of Dawson published one of the first secondary articles about him. Entitled ‘Continuity and Development in Christopher Dawson’s Thought’, the essay was an attempt by Mulloy to show the consistency in his friend’s thought in his three-decade-long career. It was published with Dawson’s own book *Dynamics of World History*.²⁸ In 1962, a Yale graduate student named Carolyn Mondschein Gold considered Dawson’s ‘Idea of History’ in her doctoral dissertation.²⁹ In contrast with his negative reaction to Schlesinger’s dissertation, Dawson was thrilled with Gold’s conclusions. Three years later, William Allen Speck provided an analysis of

²⁶ Reyes, ‘Christian Culture’, 118. See also Christina Scott, *A Historian and His World* (1984: New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1992), 126-7.

²⁷ Christopher Dawson to Bruno Schlesinger, 29 December 1949, Schlesinger Papers, UNDA.

²⁸ John J. Mulloy, ‘Continuity and Development in Christopher Dawson’s Thought’ in *The Dynamics of World History* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956), 413-468.

²⁹ Carolyn Mondschein-Gold, ‘Christopher Dawson’s Idea of History (Yale University, PhD dissertation, unpublished, 1962).

Dawson's understanding of history in his doctoral dissertation from Florida State University. In this dissertation, Dawson's historiography is compared and contrasted with several other Christian historians such as Kenneth Scott Latourette and Herbert Butterfield.³⁰

One dissertation which has been overlooked by every major study of Dawson to date was written by Ann Elisabeth Woolever in 1970 at the University of Toronto.³¹ The study took ten years to complete and was finished the year of Dawson's death but, unlike these other articles, does little to celebrate his scholarship and legacy. Unquestionably the most critical of all the secondary sources on Dawson, it highlights the anti-democratic aspects of Dawson's thought, and is critical of his perspectives concerning possible solutions to the political and economic problems of Europe. Woolever viewed the ideas of Dawson through a left-wing political lens, and thereby erroneously reduces him to an ultra-right wing theoretician, willing to throw on the garb of the brown shirts in the hopes of preserving his waning aristocratic privileges from the clutches of liberal democrats. By emphasizing the staunch religious environment of his youth, one accentuated by the rigid militarism of his father, Woolever paints a deeply-troubled Dawson, who, emotionally scarred from his childhood, relies almost completely upon romantic ideals for answers to a chaotic world.

Obviously building on Schlesinger's thesis, Woolever argues that Dawson placed his hopes in a 'future utopian world theocracy' and saw in the 'Fascist

³⁰ William Allen Speck, 'The Role of the Christian Historian in the Twentieth Century as seen in the writings of Herbert Butterfield, Kenneth Scott Latourette, and Christopher Dawson (Florida State University: PhD dissertation, unpublished, 1965).

³¹ Anne Elizabeth Woolever, 'Christopher Dawson: A Study in Anti-Democratic International Thought, 1920-1960' (University of Toronto: PhD dissertation, unpublished, 1970). As far as I know, most, if not all the scholars who have recently studied Dawson's thought have not used this dissertation in their analysis.

states of Germany, Italy, Spain and Austria, the closest approximation of his ideals of government and society.³² Moreover, she claimed that Dawson ‘urged acceptance of [fascist states] as the first step toward a theocratic world order’ and through these fascist states, ‘the ‘church’, through God’s invincible power, would inevitably come to dominate’ and ‘institute a reign of justice, peace and charity.’³³ Dawson made no such claim, although he did hope for a renewal of religion throughout Europe. By extreme interpretations of Dawson’s most controversial statements, she failed to acknowledge the dichotomy and contradiction at the heart of his political philosophy and the complexity of his perspective, all of which have since been noted by both sympathizers and non-sympathizers of his work.³⁴ In the end, Woolever’s dissertation amounts to an exaggerated account of Dawson’s political philosophy and of his hopes for a return to an authoritarian political structure in the Western world.

In 1984 a collection of articles about Dawson was edited by Peter Cataldo and published as *The Dynamic Character of Christian Culture*.³⁵ The anthology of essays includes excellent articles, most notably one by Russell Hittinger entitled ‘The Meta-historical Vision of Christopher Dawson.’ That same year, the only

³²Woolever, 1.

³³*Ibid.*, 348, 1.

³⁴For two examples see Paul Costello, *World Historians and Their Goals: Twentieth-Century Answers to Modernism* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994), 126-153 for a generally non-sympathetic perspective and Dermott Quinn, Introduction to *Dynamics of World History* (1953: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 1-15 for a generally sympathetic view. In considering Dawson’s proposed solutions to modernity, Costello noted the following: ‘To some, Dawson’s argument for Catholicism and the dominance of the Catholic centre to Western history and its role in world progress could be dismissed as a shallow Eurocentric and papist apologetic that ignores political and social realities Dawson was not, however, a mono-causalist who blindly subsumed economic, geographic, or sociological factors to the hegemony of his Church.’ (p. 128)

³⁵Peter Cataldo (ed.), *The Dynamic Character of Christian Culture: Essays on Dawsonian Themes* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984).

biography of Dawson was published by Dawson's daughter, the late Christina Scott.³⁶ As I have said above, although *A Historian and His World* provides little in the way of an in-depth analysis of Dawson's ideas, it offers unique and invaluable insights into his life through personal examples from Scott herself, as well as through a large number of quotations from unpublished correspondence between her father and his contemporaries. It continues to be the most valuable resource for any study of Dawson.

Dawson is given extensive coverage in Adrian Hastings' *A History of English Christianity 1920 -1985*, published in 1986, and Arnold Sparr's book *To Promote, Defend, and Redeem: The Catholic Literary Revival and the Transformation of American Catholicism, 1920-1960*, published in 1990.³⁷ Hastings places Dawson nicely into the context of English Christianity, while Sparr highlights the impact of Dawson's ideas on the cultural and intellectual lives of American Catholics between 1930 and 1950. Sparr claims that although Dawson was well received by most scholars and undergraduate students, a significant number of neo-scholastic scholars disliked his historical approach to the intellectual problems of the day, rather than turning to answers found in what was perceived by them as 'superior' metaphysical arguments.³⁸ Generally speaking, Sparr's book is well written, and his analysis of Dawson's involvement in the Catholic Literary Revival is solid.

³⁶ Christina Scott, *A Historian and His World: A Life of Christopher Dawson* 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1992).

³⁷ Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-1985* (London: Fount, 1987). See footnote 5 for the complete citation of Sparr's work.

³⁸ Sparr, 110.

One of the most balanced and insightful essays about Dawson was written in 1993 by James Hitchcock of St. Louis University.³⁹ Hitchcock's 'Reappraisal' is a brief and accessible summary of Dawson's life and career. Unlike many articles which analyse Dawson's ideas exclusively, Hitchcock takes seriously Dawson's place within the greater setting of twentieth-century history, highlighting changes within the disciplines of history and sociology as well as the chaotic state of politics which plagued Europe for most of Dawson's life. Hitchcock is careful to ground Dawson in context by noting how these and other developments around him moulded his ideas and directed his application of them to both intellectual and practical ends, the most important being in the area of education.

Dawson was the subject of a chapter in a book by Paul Costello entitled *World Historians and their Goals*.⁴⁰ Written in 1993, the book attempts to outline the contribution and failures of world historians who attempted to construct meta-histories based on Western models of world history. Historians such as Wells, Toynbee, Sorokin, McNeill, and Spengler were included in the study. The treatment of Dawson is very good, but Costello's desire for uniformity among global historians leads him to assume unrealistic similarities between Dawson and his counterparts. One of the goals of the present study is to answer Costello by pointing out some of the important differences that set him apart from Toynbee and Spengler.

Dawson scholarship was given a significant boost during the short five-year span between 1996 and 2000. During this 'mini-revival' of his thought, several dissertations have been written (although none have been published), numerous

³⁹James Hitchcock, 'Christopher Dawson', *American Scholar*, Vol. 62, Issue 1 (Winter 1993): 111-118.

⁴⁰Paul Costello, *World Historians and Their Goals: Twentieth-Century answers to Modernism* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1993).

articles have been printed, and several books have appeared which take seriously his life and acknowledge his contributions to historiography and Catholic thought and education. Adam Schwartz devoted two chapters in his mammoth doctoral dissertation from Northwestern University in 1996 to Dawson.⁴¹ This 1500-page dissertation is an exhaustive comparison of the anti-modern perspectives of four prominent Catholic intellectuals – Graham Greene, David Jones, G. K. Chesterton and Dawson himself. Schwartz's contribution to Dawson scholarship was his successful attempt to pull the various loose threads of Dawson's career into one cord: his anti-modern sentiments which shaped all areas of his thought.

A significant amount of material was published in 1995. A conference was held at Westminster College, Oxford to commemorate the silver jubilee of Dawson's death. Each of the papers that were delivered at the conference examined his life and work. Two years later, the proceedings were published under the fitting title, *Eternity in Time*.⁴² It contains some of the best analysis of Dawson's work. Secondly, Carl Schmitt published a book entitled *Christianity and Western Civilization: Christopher Dawson's Insights*.⁴³ Thirdly, the Emory University historian Patrick Allitt devoted a relatively large section of his book on Catholic converts to Dawson.⁴⁴ In a chapter entitled 'Transforming the Past: Convert Historians', Allitt compares and contrasts Dawson with the American Catholic historian Carlton Hayes (1882-1964). In spite of various obvious

⁴¹ Adam Schwartz, 'Third Spring: Roman Catholic Conversion and Rebellion Against Modernity in the Thought of G. K. Chesterton, Graham Green, Christopher Dawson, and David Jones' (Northwestern University: PhD dissertation,, unpublished, 1996).

⁴² Stratford Caldecott and John Morrill (eds.) *Eternity in Time* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997).

⁴³ Carl Schmitt, *Christianity and Western Civilization: Christopher Dawson's Insights* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995).

⁴⁴ Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals Turn to Rome* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

differences in their backgrounds, both of them, Allitt suggested, gave Catholic historians a new-found respectability lacking in previous generations. Three years later in 1998, an American lawyer, Gerald Russello included a lengthy and informative introduction to *Christianity and European Culture* in his edited book of a number of Dawson's previously unpublished essays.⁴⁵

Another doctoral dissertation which has already been mentioned above is Jonathon Reyes' thesis from the University of Notre Dame.⁴⁶ Finished in 2000, Reyes attempted to create a paradigm shift in the way Dawson is perceived as a scholar, arguing that Dawson 'should be understood as an apologist ... rather than as a historian or sociologist.'⁴⁷ Reyes concludes further that Dawson is 'best understood not as an academic, but as an apologist for Christian culture.'⁴⁸ Reyes' dissertation has its strengths and in spite of a flawed thesis, it is an excellent contribution to any study of Dawson's ideas.

It is my hope that the present intellectual biography achieves the following aims: the first is to provide a more balanced view of a man who was, and continues to be, misunderstood. On the one hand, those who are unsympathetic to Dawson usually dismiss his historiography on the assumption that it is too informed by a hidden agenda and that his methodology is too meta-historical to result in good historiography.⁴⁹ On the other hand, many of those who take Dawson's ideas seriously tend to present him as somehow untouched by events around him. One of

⁴⁵Gerald J. Russello (ed.) *Christianity and European Culture: Selections from the Work of Christopher Dawson* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998).

⁴⁶Jonathon Reyes, 'Christopher Dawson and the Renewal of Christian Culture' (University of Notre Dame: PhD dissertation, unpublished, 2000).

⁴⁷Reyes in his abstract to 'Christopher Dawson and the Renewal of Christian Culture.'

⁴⁸Reyes, 1.

⁴⁹See Allitt, 268-275.

the most widely used phrases in much of the secondary literature is that 'Dawson never changed his mind on this issue', revealing an attempt to make him consistent and therefore prophetic. To be fair, the theological nature of both his claims for history and of his critique of the secular outlook of modernity does in fact provide a brilliant approach to a Christian perspective of history for those who believe in the theological character of the historical process. Yet this does not mean that Dawson's work should only be studied by theologians or Christians of an Augustinian persuasion. Like the meta-historian Toynbee, the visionary historian Acton, the national historian Trevor-Roper, and the Progressivist historian E. H. Carr, Dawson was a significant twentieth-century historian and intellectual who approached history – and openly so – from a Catholic point of view – a view which certainly coloured his perspective. Moreover, one should not assume that this perspective makes his work unworthy of study. The present study, then, is an attempt to be a *via media* and a lead to more discussion.

A second aim, and one that is related to my comments near the end of the preceding paragraph, is that Dawson's place be recognized in the intellectual life of twentieth-century Britain. In the earliest years of his career, Dawson was one of the few historians in England to attempt to graft on to an empirically driven school of historical thought many of the methodological innovations of continental European historians, sociologists, and anthropologists. Indeed, he represents one of the most noteworthy of British historians to attempt a synthesis between ideological assumptions of knowledge and materialistic views of historical development. His attempt in his book *The Making of Europe* to revise long-held presumptions about the 'Dark Ages' was a much-needed correction of Enlightenment notions about the negative and anti-intellectual effects of religious belief on the progress of the human mind. T. S. Eliot's well-known book, *Notes Towards the Definition of*

Culture (1937), was on his own account, a product of his acquaintance with Dawson's opinions of the religious character of culture. Dawson's political commentary in the years leading up to the 1930s and the reaction to it offer a fascinating and rewarding glimpse into the response among Christians to the threats of fascism and communism, as well as the possible demise of democratic values. His role as an intellectual luminary among Catholics, Anglicans, and Nonconformist leaders cannot be overstated, even if the influence of the papal encyclicals on his views caused them to be misunderstood by the latter two and even by Catholics themselves. As a leader in the Second World War 'Sword of the Spirit Movement', he was one of the first English Catholics to make an attempt to bring his Church into unity with other Christians of various denominations. His term as Gifford Lecturer, his vision for Catholic higher education in the United States, and his years as the first holder of the Stillman Chair at Harvard University, all point to an engaged and influential intellectual in the twentieth century whose life and views are worthy of more study than has been attempted until now.

My final aim is a humble one: to generate more study of a man who I believe is deserving of greater attention than he has been given. I do not include this aim because I believe he was entirely, or even essentially right, but rather for the reasons why I believe he is largely unknown today. On the one hand, he has been shunned by Catholics because (and ironically so) his views were either too 'conservative' or too 'liberal.' On the other hand, it has been too easy for the historical academy to ignore him because it is often assumed that his views can be rejected on the same metahistorical grounds as those of Toynbee, Wells and Spengler.⁵⁰

⁵⁰The clearest example of this view of Dawson and his place in twentieth-century historiography is Paul Costello, *World Historians and their Goals* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994).

The very nature of this study makes it exceptionally difficult to pinpoint one overarching thesis. If there is one that comes closest to a thesis it is that in spite of Jonathon Reyes' claim that Dawson should be understood and studied as an apologist rather than a historian, I believe that Dawson can be, and indeed should be, seen as both an apologist and an historian. Reyes' thesis, while enlightening in its own right, concludes with an unfair judgement which relegates much of Dawson's scholarly contribution to the dustbin of subjective opinion. One need only be slightly familiar with continuing debates in the historical academy to understand the challenge posed by the relationship between 'calling' and 'career.' Although much more analysis of his ideas is needed by scholars in the fields of medieval history, anthropology, and sociology, one should neither downplay nor dismiss Dawson's historiography on the basis that he was also an apologist. His scholarship must be analysed and judged without any preconceived notions about how his opinions shaped his historiography.

Dawson was what is known rather pretentiously as an 'amateur historian' in the same tradition as Gibbon and Acton. Amateur or not, he was consumed by historical studies and familiarized himself with history and the trends in historical methodology occurring around him. Like Vico and Herder, Dawson believed that all cultures are shaped by history, making history and the study of it the means to *verstehen*. As both a Christian and a Romantic, Dawson believed that history, and the idea that it was progressing in a more or less linear fashion, was essentially theological and mystical, but his view was also grounded in what he called 'historical reality', elements of which could be understood through historical investigation.

In spite of the obvious tension that this created between idealist and materialist explanations of history, Dawson believed that the Augustinian

interpretation of history could be reinvigorated and confirmed in the light of new research by sociological and anthropological scholars such as Friedrich LePlay, E. B. Tylor, and W. H. R. Rivers. Hayden White noted rather misleadingly in 1958 that Dawson's 'life work may be seen as an attempt to construct a philosophy of history which will unite in a single system the modern concept of secular progress with the medieval notion, first stated clearly in St. Augustine, of history as *heilsgeschichte* or history of salvation.'⁵¹ Although White fails to recognize that Dawson eschewed 'modern concepts of progress' because they were contrary to *heilsgeschichte* and in fact parasitic of the medieval notion, he is correct in noting that Dawson was attempting to reconcile the latest scholarship with an essentially Augustinian concept of history.⁵² As we will see, the religious beliefs of societies and the transference of this higher knowledge through cultural interaction were central to this reconciliation.

Dawson believed that evidence in history was sufficiently available to schematise history, but the ends of history were ultimately a mystery and the prediction of the future was not possible from the record of the past. This tension is an essential component of the Christian understanding of the historical process and the Church as the physical extension of the incarnation of Christ. The unfolding of spiritual ends through temporal means, Dawson believed, is fundamentally paradoxical. So too was Dawson's idea of history.⁵³ All that can be deduced is that knowledge and understanding increase with the passage of time and that this progress is an unfolding of the redemptive nature of the historical process. Central

⁵¹ Hayden White, 'Religion, Culture and Western Civilization in Christopher Dawson's Idea of History,' *English Miscellany* (Rome: 1958): 249.

⁵² Russello, 220-2.

⁵³ See Costello, 126-153.

to Dawson's understanding of this unfolding, both in the past and in the present, is his vague but adamant argument that religious belief has enabled the individual and society to transcend their limited materialist perspective and glimpse ends that are not ends in themselves, but are open to the possibility of human thought and experience. According to Dawson, it was the Christian faith that has provided this inspiration in the West, and therefore remains a vital part of its essence. Like Toynbee, Dawson 'championed a diffusionist perspective on world history as a product of the mutual contributions of all associated peoples, yet he denigrated the results of this process in the East by his rejection of a Toynbeeian continuity of world religious syncretism and his claim for a unique dispensation.'⁵⁴ Costello's charge that Dawson's claim of a 'unique dispensation' showed inconsistency in his thought is well-founded, but fails to take into consideration the theological aspects of Dawson's idea of history and therefore the 'meta-rational' explanation which, unlike the purely empiricist understanding of history, leaves room for tension, paradox, and 'loose ends.' The 'dispensation' to which Costello refers was precisely the result of the Incarnation, which introduced into an otherwise cyclical historical consciousness the notion of linearity to the whole process. And although on this count Dawson is innocent, I must agree with Jonathon Reyes and Caroline Gold that Dawson's ambition for a historical synthesis suffers from tension, especially in the area of cause and effect. Indeed, he never was able to create a synthesis as closely knit as he had hoped by using the collective insights of anthropology, sociology, and history.⁵⁵

'There is a grand unity in the history of ideas,' Lord Acton wrote in a letter to Döllinger, 'of conscience, of morality, and of the means securing it. I venture to

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 151.

⁵⁵Mondschein-Gold, 65-8; Reyes, 25.

say that the secret of philosophy of History lies here: It is the only point of view from which one discovers a constant progress ...'⁵⁶ Like Acton, Dawson was optimistic about the unity of history even if this unity eluded philosophies of history. Although his idea of history is full of tension, Dawson hoped to capture and identify those elements that have been constructive in human history. In order to accomplish this end, he encouraged his own generation to turn Spengler on his head through a consideration of the religious aspects of their culture, as well as the creative spirit that transforms human societies as cultures come into contact and interact. For those whose cultural origins are 'Western,' Dawson's hope was for a recognition of the positive role Christianity has played in social development, so that its transformative power may be unleashed in a world devastated by political, economic, and social turmoil.⁵⁷

⁵⁶Acton to Döllinger, quoted in Hugh MacDougall, 'The Later Acton' In Garret Sweeney (ed.), *Bishops and Writers* (Wheatthamstead: Anthony Clarke, 1977), 42.

⁵⁷See *JON*, 220-2.

Part One

Beginnings

Intimations of Utopia

It is generally accepted that the first decade and a half of a person's life is the most important period in the development of his perspective as an adult. Not so clear is the extent to which these experiences are responsible for certain actions and decisions the individual may make later in life. It is perhaps a mystery best left to psychologists. Yet when one is writing a history of an individual and their ideas, these questions are impossible to ignore. Further, whether the historian possesses knowledge of psychology or not, they must make certain educated judgements, making reference to what they believe is sufficiently noteworthy when weighed against the evidence that exists about the subject's childhood. Indeed, the challenge is to avoid both exaggeration and the dismissal of important connections in order that much-needed light is cast on that most noble ambition of understanding the relationship between cause and effect.

An intellectual biography of Christopher Dawson is certainly subject to these difficulties and is particularly prone to exaggeration. One of the primary difficulties in securing an honest account of the formation of Dawson's ideas is that he recounted his earliest memories many years after the experiences themselves. These experiences were recorded in 1949 in an article by Dawson

himself, making them reflections rather than accounts.¹ There are primary sources which do exist in the forms of letters to relatives written while he was away at various schools as well as a limited amount of information in a personal journal. The journal, however, is in the hands of his literary estate and only what has been noted in Christina Scott's book is available to the reading public.² A second difficulty is the religious character of Dawson's life and the exaggerated claims that have been made about the impact of this religious character on his adulthood. The clearest example of the problem this poses is the exaggeration which plagued Ann Elisabeth Woolever's discussion of the connections between Dawson's conservatism and his rigid upbringing. Woolever reduces all of Dawson's later ideas and writings to those of a man struggling to come to terms with his youth through the psychological analysis of his childhood. Moreover, she overstates 'influential factors in [Dawson's] life' by devoting five pages to how the rigid militarism of his father had certain psychological affects on him. While this may be true, it is perhaps inappropriate to make the assumption that his father's 'militaristic rule' did indeed affect Dawson's development to the extent that she claims. Speculation such as this only complicates what is already a difficult task: to explain the complex thought of Dawson who, in the words of his daughter, 'lived almost entirely in the mind.'³ About these formative years, then, one must write humbly, admitting that important connections can be made despite these difficulties.

¹See Christopher Dawson, 'Tradition and Inheritance: Memories of a Victorian Childhood' *The Wind and the Rain* (1949). Reprinted in Scott, *Historian*, 221-239.

²These sources are in the hands of the literary estate and are not for public viewing. There are extensive references to them in Christina Scott's biography.

³Scott, *Historian*, 9.

Unquestionably, Dawson was shaped by what he sensed was the transcendent quality of his surroundings and was moved by an even stronger sense of unity and personal connection to the historical process, all of which he inherited from his environment and his parents in the first decade of his life. These 'intimations' would find concrete expressions in the world around him as he became acutely aware of the world outside his home through schooling, travel, and his own personal studies. Indeed, all of these experiences would culminate in his 'divine calling' to write a history of world culture in 1909 and in his conversion to the Catholic Church in 1914.

Dawson's father's family was of yeoman stock from the central part of Yorkshire. Since the eighteenth century, they had had a rather formidable military tradition, with one ancestor boasting service under Wellington at Waterloo.⁴ Dawson's father, Henry Dawson, an officer with the rank of Colonel, was proud of his decision to continue this legacy of military service; yet he was more of an intellectual and desired the adventure of travel more than the actual military life, making him 'more of an explorer than a soldier.'⁵ His choice of career meant that he was away from his family for long periods – a situation that was eased somewhat by the welcome opportunity to study other regions and cultures. His military background and passion for tradition did make him somewhat of a taskmaster who demanded a strict household, creating 'discipline and order' which his son recalled was 'stimulating and not repressive.'⁶ Dawson wrote that his father was intensely religious, with a deep sense of duty to 'set the religious tone of [his]

⁴Scott, *Historian*, 20.

⁵*Ibid.*, 20.

⁶Dawson, 'Tradition and Inheritance,' 30-1.

family's life.'⁷ In 'Tradition and Inheritance', Dawson noted that 'he always used Catholic books of devotion' and 'abolished the traditional Victorian family prayers in favor of Terce and Compline.'⁸ Moreover, in spite of Henry Dawson's High Church affiliation and close friendship with Lord Halifax, the leader of the Anglo-Catholic movement, he 'had little of the via media Anglicanism of the High Church party.'⁹ It is clear that Dawson had the utmost respect for his father and his perspective and maintained a personal affinity with his anti-modernism that would form the basis for many of his own religious sentiments and decisions as an adult.¹⁰

Dawson's mother, Mary Louisa Bevan was the eldest daughter of Archdeacon Bevan, a locally celebrated figure who came from a long line of Anglican clergymen with deeply established roots in Hay-on-Wye, a small village on the Welsh border. The Bevans were landowners in the region which, in the book *Kilvert's Diary*, has been described as an 'Anglican theocracy.'¹¹ Mary took her lineage seriously indeed. Like her husband, she was a deeply religious individual whose intellectual breadth in the areas of literature, poetry, and hagiography was matched only by her passion for passing it on to her children. She was 'thoroughly Welsh by nature,' Dawson recalled in fondness, and 'passionately devoted to the Welsh country and country people and the Welsh traditions, [but]

⁷ Schwartz, 737.

⁸ Dawson, 'Tradition and Inheritance,' 28.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁰ See Schwartz, 737-739.

¹¹ Francis Kilvert, *Kilvert's Diary 1870-1879*. Edited and introduced by William Plomer, (Oxford: Alder Press, 1960).

above all to the Welsh saints.’¹² Her love for religious tradition was primarily for the Anglican Church as she had little time for the Catholic roots of the tradition. Like the rest of her family, she was thoroughly prejudiced about the Catholic Church.¹³ Yet in spite of their feelings against Roman Catholics, both parents esteemed tradition and sought to pass on to their children the historical sensibility that accompanied it.

Into this rich heritage Henry Christopher Dawson was born on 12 October 1889 in the Bevan ancestral home of Hay Castle.¹⁴ Endowed with a ‘face of great character with dark intelligent eyes and a strong physique,’ he was an extraordinarily curious boy with a seemingly insatiable thirst for knowledge.¹⁵ The twelfth-century Hay Castle provided a striking backdrop for the formal education he received from his mother as well as the informal education that took place on his own time, usually through his imagination as he played in the many rooms and halls. ‘Full of history and legend,’ his daughter recalled, ‘it was a romantic house for a child in his early years; at one end was a ruined tower, reputed to be haunted, and there were secret passages to be explored, connecting the ancient castle and the later building.’¹⁶ The long history of the castle gave Dawson ‘a sense of continuity with the past and present.’¹⁷ Recalling these early years of experiences, he wrote:

¹²Scott, *Historian*, 27-28.

¹³*Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁴Dawson went by the name Christopher in spite of being given the first name of Henry.

¹⁵Scott, *Historian*, 14.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 15.

No one could owe more to childhood impressions than I did. In fact it was then I acquired my love of history, my interest in the differences of cultures and my sense of the importance of religion in human life, as a massive, objective, unquestioned power that entered into everything and impressed its mark on the external as well as the internal world.¹⁸

The castle, in his own words, gave him the sense of the veneration of tradition by which 'time seemed the preserver, not the destroyer.'¹⁹

When he was not dreaming of the castle's past glories, he would roam the countryside around Hay, fostering an intimate connection with the mystery of nature. His experiences during these excursions were not unlike those of medieval mystics who sensed a unity with their natural surroundings and see 'something infinite behind everything.'²⁰ From Dawson's own observations, like Blake he learned that 'true vision is to see a World in a Grain of Sand, And a heaven in a wildflower, Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand, and Eternity in an hour.'²¹ What impressed Dawson at an early age before he was completely versed in his parents' theological beliefs, then, was a rudimentary form of mysticism. Thus he could claim like John Henry Newman that at a young age he had an 'other-worldly vision ... which gave him the ... sense of another world more real than this one.'²²

From his earliest memories Dawson found expression in the image of the two vastly different regions on which Hay bordered:

The rich Herefordshire countryside and the poor and wild Welsh hills of Radnor Forest to the North and the Black Mountain which rose immediately behind Hay to the South.²³

¹⁸Dawson, 'Tradition and Inheritance,' 12.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 16.

²⁰See Marion Glasscoe, *English Medieval Mystics: Games of Faith* (London: Longman, 1993), 3.

²¹Geoffrey Keynes (ed.), *Complete Works of Blake* (London: 1966), 431.

²²Sheridan Gilley, *Newman and his Age* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003), 9.

²³Dawson quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 14.

Rather than attempting to refer to variations in the region's geography, Dawson was instead highlighting the symbolic value of living in a place where 'two worlds met.'²⁴

At the time he certainly would not have been consciously aware of the Platonic character of his earliest musings, yet the similarity between his observations and Plato's dualism is clear. In the meantime, the link remained a subtle one and would not be fully realized until he became aware of neo-Platonism and the writings of Church fathers such as St. Augustine.

Dawson's parents took the Christian faith seriously and in spite of their differences in ecclesiastical background, their common convictions concerning national and religious traditions strengthened Dawson's sense of history and continuity as well as the value of commonalities in spite of differences of opinion. 'Thanks to my parents,' he acknowledged in 1949, 'I learnt the essential connection between story and history, so that I came to know the past not so much by the arid path of the Child's History of England as through the enchanted world of myth and legend. In this way I discovered very early that history was not a flat expanse of time, measured off in dates, but a series of different worlds and that each of them had its own spirit and form and its own riches of poetic imagination. And as myth passed into history, so history in its turn left its visible imprint on the world I knew.'²⁵

Playing a vital role in this connection between 'story' and 'history' were his mother's tales of Welsh mythology and oral traditions. For Dawson, myth was the meeting place of history and poetry and thus the means by which the experiences of people in 'different worlds' were communicated and most fully

²⁴Scott, *Historian*, 14.

²⁵Dawson, 'Tradition and Inheritance', Part II, 1949.

expressed. If history is about human experience, mythology and traditions could help portray the past more genuinely than historiography which ignores these glimpses into the cultural fabric of the social consciousness of the world's peoples. Indeed, stories play a vital role in socialization and therefore shape history whether or not they are 'factual.'²⁶ Later in his life, Dawson credited his mother's lessons in poetry and mythology with giving him a broader sense of historical process, and of the importance of myth and legend in deciphering the fullness of humanity's historical experience.

If Dawson's mother was responsible for shaping his historical sensibility, his father was responsible for expanding his interests in mysticism by placing it in a global context. Through his father's books and journals, he was introduced to the richness to be found in the social and religious practices of the world's cultures.²⁷ After returning from his excursions with the military, his father would bring home artifacts and stories, whetting his son's interests in the religious and social practices of the people he had encountered. His interest in the world's cultures would only grow stronger as he read Friedrich von Hügel's *The Mystical Element of Religion*. It would eventually become the dominant theme in almost all of his own books.

Socially, Hay became an ideal social structure for Dawson. He saw it as an idyllic world full of history and religious character in which the town church was the centre of the community and where the old aristocratic allegiances were still respected. Indeed, as he wrote later in his life, it was 'a complete unification of

²⁶ As we will see, his mother unwittingly had prepared her son for the historical criticism of Ernst Troeltsch in his *Social Teachings of the Christian Churches* (1912), a book which shaped Dawson's convictions about history and theology.

²⁷ According to Scott, the Welsh poet David Jones wrote in his journal that Colonel Dawson's library was 'worthy of a monastery.' See Scott, *Historian*, 56.

political, religious, economic and social authority and influence.'²⁸ With the passage of time, the intimations of social utopia to which Hay pointed became an idealistic but profound collection of memories, yet would remain the measure by which all other social and political systems were compared and judged by Dawson.

When Dawson was seven, his life in idyllic Hay-on-Wye came to an end. Rather than accept a post in Singapore and take his young family to Asia, his father chose to retire and settle down and move the family to his ancestral region of Craven in Yorkshire. Eccentric as well as romantic, he spurned the 'rootlessness of nineteenth-century culture' and therefore made the decision to settle in Yorkshire in order to 'recover contact with lost family traditions.'²⁹ Consistent with his dedication to social and religious traditions, the move demonstrated his 'reaction against the Protestant tradition' and his 'attempt to recover lost spiritual roots in a past which he felt to be Catholic.'³⁰ His father's decision proved to have a profound impact on the formation of Dawson's sense of place, as he was only now beginning to understand and embrace the religious traditions of his parents. For, as Schwartz notes, 'Dawson asserted that his all-important first impression of Craven was of an objective correlative to Catholic rejections of modernity, a cell of Catholic culture defined by its resistance to Protestantism and industrialism.'³¹ Dawson himself called Craven a 'true expression of the genius loci which has survived the religious revolution of the sixteenth century and the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century.'³²

²⁸ Scott, *Historian*, 213.

²⁹ Dawson, 'Tradition and Inheritance,' 18.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

³¹ Schwartz, 'Third Spring', 737.

³² Dawson, 'Tradition and Inheritance,' 26-27.

It would be entirely possible to assume that his father's decision to move the family away from southern Wales to the new and much harsher locale and climate of Northern England could have been difficult for the seven-year-old Dawson. Yet, according to Scott, he saw the move as a journey to a new world. Clearly he loved his new home in which 'the whole aspect of the country with the stone walls climbing the hills and the naked rock thrusting itself out in great scars and promontories like sea cliffs, was entirely unlike anything [he] had seen before.'³³ The mystical intimations gained from his natural surroundings around Hay continued as he noted that Hartlington Hall – the new home his father built for the family in 1897 – was located 'where two countries meet – on the one side, the dark fells, on the other the green hills.'³⁴ Not only was it the meeting place of two regions, but also of two historical eras; the deeply religious medieval period and the modern era, the division between the two being the 'lost element in the northern culture.'³⁵ If Hay represented an ideal social order based on tradition and old aristocratic ideals, Craven, in spite of its continuity with the past, represented the loss of tradition, principally at the hand of modernizing tendencies since the Reformation in England. 'Nowhere was the destruction of the monasteries more bitterly resented than in Craven,' Dawson pointed out. 'The fall of the abbeys left a gap in northern culture which was never filled either by the Church of England or the Nonconformists and the attempt of the new yeoman class to fill it by the foundation of the village grammar schools was but a superficial solution.'³⁶

³³ Dawson as quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 23.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁵ Scott, *Historian*, 23-24.

³⁶ Dawson, 'Tradition and Inheritance', 25-26, 27.

In the years following their move to Craven, his father's sense of lost roots and anti-modernism began to germinate in Dawson's own mind as he increasingly felt isolated both intellectually and culturally from the world around him: 'The world I had accepted as the solid foundation of my own life and the life of my family and the life of England was not the world of my contemporaries, but a detached fragment of the past which had somehow managed to survive on the margin between the present and the past.'³⁷ Indeed, patterns of behaviour in his daily activities confirms what Schwartz calls Dawson's sense of being a 'cultural outsider.'³⁸ '[Dawson] and his sister invented a whole world of make-believe, peopled by historical characters usually fighting for a lost cause. In turn they identified themselves with the cause of Alfonso, the boy-king of Spain (after whom they named one of their pet mice) or with Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Jacobites. All their animals – the dog, the pony and the mice – were given Jacobite names and were part of the historical game.'³⁹ Moreover the world of rudimentary Platonism he had sensed in Hay had progressed to a more concrete Augustinian form as seen clearest in his first essay, 'The Gold City and the Coal City' in which Christians and heathens were engaged in a battle against each other.⁴⁰ From an early age, then, Dawson had developed a strong sense of personal isolation from the modern world around him, as well as a more general feeling of detachment from a past that had been ideally constructed throughout his youth. In its psychological implications, Craven was Dawson's Tintern Abbey. Yet given the background of his home life and his shy and melancholic temperament, it was all a

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

³⁸ Schwartz, 739.

³⁹ Scott, *Historian*, 30.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

wonderful and nostalgic world where he lived 'a solitary and secluded boyhood in which [he] was extremely happy.'⁴¹ Like all good things, however, his peaceful world of imagination and mysticism had to come to an end. For Dawson, this end proved to be particularly abrupt and devastating.

⁴¹Dawson quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 27.

‘Paradise Lost’: Bilton Grange, Winchester, and Bletsoe

By 1899 the circumstances of Dawson’s youth had already created in him a sense of enmity between himself and the external world. The prospect of leaving his own world at the young age of ten, then, was nothing short of devastating as he faced losing the religious and imaginative elements which were the basis of his sense of security. His parents had decided that their son should begin his formal education at Bilton Grange, a preparatory school near Rugby. The traumatic experience of the school, which will be discussed below, would make an indelible impact on his mind and instilled in him a lifelong hatred for English public school education and ‘the dreaded Midlands.’⁴² His journal entries and letters from the period clearly articulate the depths of his personal pain caused by related emotional, physical, and intellectual difficulties with facing the world outside his beloved home life. In fact, the negative impressions left by his experiences at school went so deep that when he neared the gates of a school his daughter was about to attend, he muttered ‘I can’t face it’ and spent the afternoon reading in the wood outside the school while the others toured the grounds.⁴³

⁴²Scott, *Historian*, 31.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 34.

Considering his first span of time away from home, Scott observed that 'just as his happy childhood years at home had influenced his life for the good, so now the situation went into reverse and the physical and psychological sufferings of his schooldays could be said to have had a disastrous and permanent influence on his whole life.'⁴⁴ In retrospect, however, the effects were most certainly permanent but perhaps not as disastrous as Scott would have us believe. The personal struggles of this period which plunged him into such depths of private despair would later be contributory to his adult life by fostering his cynicism about the modern world. This 'end of a personal era' was perhaps the most important event in Dawson's personal development.⁴⁵ Not only was it the end of a personal era but also the end of his youthful optimism. It magnified for him both the order of his childhood and the chaos of modern life. Indeed, the period was personally scarring but ultimately beneficial for personal and professional development through the creation of a passion expressed in his calling and his career.

Dawson's hatred for Bilton Grange and the Midlands was immediate.⁴⁶ Within the first few days of his tenure at Bilton Grange, Dawson became aware that the world outside Hay with its political, religious and social unity, and Craven, was very different indeed. His fellow students were, in his own words, a 'horde of savages' who cared little for his own 'interests or ideas or beliefs or traditions.'⁴⁷ The system itself reflected these differences, placing sports on par with academic study and religious instruction. Dawson did not excel in sports and this only magnified his sense of isolation with the culture of the school. Yet 'apart from the

⁴⁴ Scott, *Historian*, 31.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 30-1.

⁴⁶ Schwartz, 740.

⁴⁷ Scott, *Historian*, 30-2.

uncongenial society, and the organized games,' Scott noted, 'what he really disliked ... were the narrow limits set by the curriculum and the religion of the school chapel which ... he found "strange and distasteful" in contrast to the Anglo-Catholic religion in which he had been brought up.'⁴⁸

Bilton Grange had reinforced Dawson's earlier convictions that he was an outsider by demonstrating the modern sensibilities that dominated late Victorian society. These sensibilities contradicted the social and spiritual elements of his Anglo-Catholic tradition and his religious convictions in general. That he felt isolated in this system is clear from memories about his education. 'From the time I was thirteen or fourteen,' he recalled, 'I had come to know the lives of the Catholic saints and the writings of medieval Catholic mystics and they made so strong an impression on my mind that I felt that there must be something lacking in any theory of life which left no room for these higher types of character and experience.'⁴⁹

Dawson's father hoped that his son would find Winchester a less confining learning atmosphere, and sent him there in 1903. According to all involved with the decision, Winchester was an immense improvement and allowed for a less restrictive environment suited for 'traditionalists, intellectuals and even eccentrics.'⁵⁰ In spite of what Dawson believed was an improvement over the curriculum at Bilton Grange, he did not excel. History and English were his best

⁴⁸Dawson quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 32.

⁴⁹Christopher Dawson, 'Why I am a Catholic' reprinted in *Chesterton Review* 9, no.2 (May1983): 111.

⁵⁰Scott, *Historian*, 33.

subjects but his lack of interest in other subjects hurt his overall standing so that his 'academic progress was not brilliant.'⁵¹

His disappointment with the standard religious instruction continued, and he admitted later that he 'learnt more from ... visits to the Cathedral at Winchester than ... from the hours of religious instruction in school.' The one redeeming feature of Winchester was the Cathedral in which the 'tombs of the Saxon kings and the medieval statesmen-bishops ... gave one a greater sense of the magnitude of the religious element in our culture and the depths of its roots in our national life than anything one could learn from books.'⁵² Dawson also benefited from his long visits with his uncle, the Rev. William Dawson, during his holidays. A High Church Christian Socialist who had 'been under Tractarian influences', his uncle was an intelligent man who enjoyed his discussions with his nephew.⁵³ Although the extent of his uncle's influence during these discussions is not known, it most certainly played a role in Dawson's analysis of the claims of the Tractarians and Anglo-Catholicism in general when he was at Oxford.

Even though he admitted much later in his life that Winchester was 'the best of [the] English schools,' Dawson still held the academic study at Winchester in contempt, mainly because the educators held contrary opinions to his own. In time he learned enough to know that the knowledge he had gained begged answers to the questions he could so easily avoid through his usual retreats to Winchester Cathedral.⁵⁴ Over time he was overwhelmed by a personal scepticism which was undoubtedly caused by his exposure to multiple viewpoints and the pragmatic

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 33.

⁵²Scott, *Historian*, 33.

⁵³Schwartz, 742.

⁵⁴Scott, *Historian*, 33.

character of late-Victorian public schools.⁵⁵ The public schools, which existed primarily to 'produce leaders for the state,' had weakened the faith of the idealistic Dawson, and by the time he left Winchester after only one year of study 'the tension between the Anglo-Catholicism of his home life and the liberal Christianity of his school days which had been building for almost six years now burst', leaving him sceptical of the validity of the Anglo-Catholic faith.⁵⁶

After a severe bout of bronchitis, Dawson left Winchester in 1904 for Bletsoe in Bedfordshire to study, with a small group of other boys, under a tutor. Very shortly following his move to Bedfordshire, he consciously decided to make an intellectual departure from the Anglo-Catholic tradition to a more general and more nominal belief in the principles of Christianity.⁵⁷ His derision for the weaknesses of Anglo-Catholicism caused a conflict with another student Edward Watkin with whom he often had verbal sparring sessions, one of which ended rather violently when Watkin forced a chair down on Dawson's head.⁵⁸ In spite of their differences, they eventually became the closest of friends.

In a letter to M. D. Knowles, Watkin recalled that Dawson's arguments against any inherent authority in the Anglo-Catholic Church were 'too difficult to answer for my comfort.'⁵⁹ They were in fact too difficult for Dawson himself to answer, and by 1906 he had become a self-declared agnostic who had not only lost

⁵⁵L.C.B. Seaman, *Victorian England: Aspects of English and Imperial History 1837-1901* (London: Methuen, 1973), 276-277. See also Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 283-4.

⁵⁶Seaman, *Victorian England*, 277; Schwartz, 'Third Spring,' 744.

⁵⁷Schwartz, 'Third Spring,' 744.

⁵⁸Scott, *Historian*,

⁵⁹Watkin quoted in M.D. Knowles, 'Christopher Dawson, 1889-1970' *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 1971 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 441.

faith in his own tradition but in 'religion altogether.'⁶⁰ Entering a period of personal solipsism, he wrote in a journal that same year: 'there appears ... no certainty except my own existence ... [I believe] we can conceive nothing.'⁶¹ His experiences within the systems of education as well as the education itself created a 'conflict of authorities', and led him to conclude that the religious impressions and traditions of his youth, while formative, were nothing more than subjective sensual impressions unable to demonstrate any universal validity outside of them.

Dawson's agnostic phase was a product of uncertainty rather than the result of a well-constructed intellectual position, and was therefore brief. His conviction about the validity of religious belief in general was too strong, and he recorded later that he 'could not acquiesce altogether in a view of life which left no place for religion.'⁶² By 1907 he was able to confess that Christianity might be 'a possibility among other possibilities,' but qualified his admission that he had 'not the slightest conviction' that it was true.⁶³ While his doubts were certainly caused by a rift between the culture of his childhood and his schooling, as the religious training in the schools became more sophisticated, his scepticism about Christianity was amplified by the swirling theological debates of the early twentieth century, almost all of which revolved around historical theology and the study of history in general.⁶⁴ In retrospect, he said he was forced to wrestle with the 'haze of vagueness and uncertainty which hung around the more fundamental articles of

⁶⁰ Dawson, 'Why I am a Catholic,' 111.

⁶¹ Scott, *Historian*, 37.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 45.

⁶³ 1907 diary entry by Dawson quoted by Scott, *Historian*, 38 as quoted in Schwartz, 745.

⁶⁴ Claude Welch, 'Confidence and Questions' in Hastings et al. (eds.), *Christian Thought: A Brief History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 139.

Christian dogma.’⁶⁵ Adding to his questions were the doubts surrounding ‘the one standard of authority in the Protestant world, the Bible,’ which was a victim of the growing emphasis on textual criticism.

The deductive theology of the age was to be the catalyst for Dawson’s questioning of authority. The greatest and most widely read theologian of the time was the liberal Protestant Adolf von Harnack. By using the ‘critical-historical’ method to understand the essence of the gospel, Harnack concluded that, in order to be truly academic and scientific, theologians must reject many of the supernatural claims of the Bible as well as long-held Christian traditions such as the Nicæan and Chalcedonian creeds. Harnack was able to persuade others of this perspective, many of whom concluded that ‘the old apologetics that took prophecy and miracle as warrants for ‘revealed truth’ had to be abandoned.’⁶⁶ The debates pointed to ‘a far wider unease between theological thought, traditional belief, and church authority, whether Protestant, Anglican, or Catholic.’⁶⁷ Although Dawson was still relatively sympathetic to orthodoxy beneath his facade of scepticism, he actually welcomed the growing emphasis on history as a means to discovering the origin and nature of authority. History, he had been taught from an early age by his parents, was an oracle of truth, and as a nominal Anglo-Catholic, discontented with his present intellectual state, he was eager to use any means – liberal or orthodox – to find answers to his questions.

In 1908, Dawson spent the summer with his father in Germany. He spent much of his time attempting to master German, a language he liked even less than the country. In a letter to his sister, he described Germany as a ‘most dreadful’

⁶⁵Dawson quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 37.

⁶⁶Welch, ‘Confidence and Questions,’ 144.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 155.

country with a society much 'like the state ... in *Lord of the World*.'⁶⁸ 'People get on so very well without religion' he wrote, 'they do not seem bigoted like English "undenominationalists" but they examine Christianity as if it was a kind of beetle. It is all as different as if one was living among Chinese.'⁶⁹ His dislike for the country, however, was not transferred to the German scholarship he encountered during his visit. Germany's large and well-endowed universities were leading the world, attracting students and scholars from all over the world. Goethe, von Ranke, G.W.F. Hegel, and Ernst Troeltsch made an immediate impression on Dawson, instilling in him a lifelong admiration for continental scholarship, long after it had fallen out of favour between the world wars. Goethe and von Ranke reignited Dawson's passion for history as a means to truth and Hegel's dialectical philosophy of a contrary, yet ultimately complementary, dynamic to history opened the door for infinite possibilities in the historical process. The writings of Ernst Troeltsch confirmed a long held belief of Dawson's that it was through humanity's religious experience and its expression in the social order that the most real and authentic authority has been configured. In fact, Troeltsch, more than any of these thinkers, would continue to consume Dawson's mind when he returned to England in the autumn to begin the next phase of his schooling at Oxford. His personal readings while at Bletsoe, together with the scholarship he had met in Germany, began to rebuild his faith, aiding him in his search for the source and nature of authority throughout history. The exact face of authority was still opaque, but the outline was clear enough to remove any of his agnostic convictions.

⁶⁸Dawson quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 40. *Lord of the World* (1908) was a book written by Robert Hugh Benson in which he describes the end of the world in terms of its apostasy from Catholicism.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 40.

Trinity College, Oxford: Calling and Conversion

By the time Dawson entered Trinity College, Oxford in the autumn of 1908 to read for a degree in history, he had returned to the Anglo-Catholicism of his youth. However, his uncertainty about authority within the Christian faith continued to preoccupy his thoughts, and he continued to criticize the faith of his youth. His connection to the Anglo-Catholic faith was certainly weaker than before his agnostic phase as he grew in the realization that what personal connections to Anglo-Catholicism existed were based not on steadfast convictions but rather on subjective and sentimental loyalties. The sectarian character of the church contradicted its Catholicity and therefore weakened its claims of succession from Christ and the Apostles. The church was, in his own words, 'weak in the very point where it claimed to be strongest. It was lacking in authority. It was not the teaching of the official church, but of an enterprising minority which provided its own standards of orthodoxy.'⁷⁰ He therefore was a 'half-hearted' Anglo-Catholic, a state seen clearest in his refusal to join the Oxford Anglo-Catholic society, aptly called 'The Spikes.'⁷¹ Oxford nevertheless provided a starting point for the process of rebuilding that would take place over the next six years.

⁷⁰ Dawson, 'Why I am a Catholic,' 110.

⁷¹ Scott, *Historian*, 46.

In spite of his usual shyness, sickness, and personal restlessness, Dawson welcomed the freedom an Oxford education gave him to study subjects that interested him most. There were still the required readings on the syllabus, but his tutor, Sir Ernest Barker, recognizing his pupil's wide range of interests in historiography, encouraged Dawson to read studies on the philosophy of History and the Middle Ages in spite of Barker's own research in Classical studies. Clearly, Dawson's ongoing search for authority and his overall 'spiritual restlessness' dictated his choice of themes and authors.⁷² The list of books included his favourite German scholars, but was rounded out through the sociology of Weber, Lord Acton's historiography, St. Augustine's *City of God*, and Aristotle's political works. He continued to read von Hügel, as well as any other mystical writings he could acquire. His choice of subjects was strategic, since most of the individuals whom he studied took seriously the role of religion in history, either through a consideration of the relationship between religion and culture and history or the centrality of Christianity to Western Civilization. Weber proved to be an influential figure in Dawson's anti-modernism, fuelling his hatred for modern industrialism and the culturally devoid character of capitalism.

Troeltsch continued to strengthen Dawson's sense of the centrality of Christianity to the identity of the West. In contrast to the universal approach of the Enlightenment which downplayed, and indeed *repudiated*, the positive role of religion in the history of Western civilization, Troeltsch asserted that 'all our thoughts and feelings are impregnated with Christian motives and Christian pre-suppositions ... our European conceptions of personality and its eternal, divine right, and of progress towards a kingdom of the spirit and of God, our enormous

⁷²Schwartz, 749.

capacity of expansion and for the interconnection of spiritual and temporal, our whole social order, our science, our art – all of these rest, whether we know it or not, whether we like it or not, upon the basis of ... Christianity.’⁷³ Thus, in spite of Dawson’s admiration for its glorious past and its centrality to medieval culture, he had always considered Roman Catholicism to be a dead religion, unworthy of commitment. A trip to Rome in 1909 convinced him of the opposite and he began to consider seriously the arguments for the legitimacy of the authority of the Roman Catholic Church.

It was on this trip to Rome that Dawson ‘realized for the first time that Catholic civilization did not stop with the Middle Ages, and that contemporary with our own national Protestant development there was the wonderful flowering of the Baroque culture.’⁷⁴ Whereas his fellow convert Ronald Knox could only see the excessive Baroque architecture and his own inability to obtain *Punch*, Dawson saw in Rome evidence of what he called ‘living religion’ in which the material world remained transfigured by ‘faith.’⁷⁵ The Baroque architecture gave him a sense of ‘pure joy’ as it represented for him a passionate, ecstatic, mystical spirituality.⁷⁶ It was an example, for Dawson, of the meeting between mysticism and material phenomena; he claimed that Rome had given him a ‘revelation’ of ‘a whole new world of religion and culture.’⁷⁷ His sense of the majesty of the Baroque, therefore, became the linchpin for his earlier sense of the importance of

⁷³ Ernst Troeltsch, *Christian Thought: Its History and Application*, edited by Friedrich von Hügel (London: University of London Press, 1923).

⁷⁴ Dawson, ‘Why I am a Catholic,’ 111-112.

⁷⁵ See Evelyn Waugh, *Ronald Knox* (London, 1959), 100.

⁷⁶ Dawson, ‘Why I am a Catholic,’ 112.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

mysticism to history and the vitality of the Catholic tradition within Western civilization as well as its continued role in the future. Upon consideration of R. V. Young's work on Dawson, Adam Schwartz observes that 'Dawson found the Baroque resonant with his sense of being an anti-modern cultural dissident.'⁷⁸ 'The culture of the Baroque,' Young writes, 'is the concrete manifestation of the attempt to curb the forces of nationalism, secularism, and social disunity that emerged with the Reformation and the more extreme elements of Renaissance humanism. There is a very real sense in which the Baroque is Catholicity embattled.'⁷⁹ Dawson felt a strong connection with the Roman Catholic Church as an anti-modern institution which stood for the values that were closest to him. The Church had been battling the same forces of secularization and scepticism that Dawson had felt were threatening to his own tradition and convictions, giving him a sense of solidarity with the Church counteracting his earlier view that it was an antiquated institution, a decadent remnant of the distant past. Because of its ongoing mission as well as its claims to apostolic succession and a cultural and moral authority, Dawson now considered Roman Catholicism a 'living religion,' one with which he had much affinity.

In an epiphany near the end of his trip to Rome, Dawson was struck with a sense of a divinely appointed mission. Rome had proved to be for him a living and tangible example of the claims for religion in history as expressed by Acton, Troeltsch, and Weber. Building on the last four years of intense theological and historical readings, he was convinced more than ever that writing an exhaustive history of world cultures was possible. Believing that it was 'God's will' that he

⁷⁸Schwartz, 753.

⁷⁹R. V. Young, 'Christopher Dawson and Baroque Culture' in Cataldo, *Dynamic Character*, 131.

should do so, he made a personal vow to compile such a book in a series of five volumes. His choice of location to make the vow was more meaningful than the vow itself: he made it at the *Ara Coeli*, where, more than a hundred years before, Edward Gibbon had been moved to write his monumental book *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

Scott observes that 'Rome had given Christopher a goal to work for but it had not yet changed his religion.'⁸⁰ Dawson returned to England with a determination to keep his vow and write what would be a monumental series of books. Indeed, he underlined a passage in one of his favourite books by Newman, in which the Cardinal wrote, 'I have work to do in England.'⁸¹ As well as preparing for this ambitious project, Dawson continued to study Tractarianism and the root of social and religious authority. His experience in Rome and his study of Tractarianism began "a courtship leading to the marriage of Newman's and [his] true minds.'⁸² Shortly after his return, Dawson attended a lecture given by Wilfrid Ward which allowed him to make a 'series of links between the tradition of English culture I knew and the Christian culture of the past.'⁸³ The Oxford Movement and the Anglo-Catholicism that followed were incapable of withstanding the forces of liberalism and secularization. The lack of authority he lamented in his High Church tradition was in direct opposition to the principles the

⁸⁰Scott, *Historian*, 50.

⁸¹This passage was underlined in his copy of *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. See John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* in A Norton Critical Edition, David J. DeLaura (ed.) (1866; New York: Norton, 1968), 40.

⁸²Schwartz, 755.

⁸³Christopher Dawson, 'Dealing with the Enlightenment and Liberal Ideology,' *The Commonweal*, 60 (14 May 1954): 139.

movement had been founded in order to support.⁸⁴ Schwartz makes the excellent observation that ‘studying the Oxford Movement helped Dawson deal with the persistent questions of authority and [provided him with] an intellectual basis for personal belief. Not only did [Dawson] note Newman’s description of John Keble as someone “who guided himself and formed his judgements ... by authority,”’ Schwartz continues, ‘but he also highlighted a passage in which the Cardinal characterized Roman Catholicism as a “great objective fact,” the very language Dawson used to denote religion’s impression on him in childhood and at Winchester Cathedral.’⁸⁵ The failure of the movement to stay true to its original aims revealed that the movement’s stand for ‘Authority and Tradition against Liberalism’ could only find continuity under the authority of Rome, a conclusion Newman came to as well. Clearly, Dawson’s thought was becoming, and in fact remained, ‘essentially Tractarian.’⁸⁶

Dawson’s future decision to join the Roman Church was not only informed by intellectual inquiry, but was also guided by personal relationships as well. His friend Edward Watkin had begun his studies at Oxford the same year as Dawson, and the presence of his extroverted friend eased the transition from the small school at Bledsoe to University. The friends spent hours discussing theology and poetry and history, each topic a favourite from their Bledsoe days. At some point between 1909 and 1910 Watkin had broken his own ties with Anglo-Catholicism and had joined the Roman Catholic Church. He obviously hoped that his friend would soon follow suit. His friendship with Watkin was not the only one to

⁸⁴Cf. Dawson, *SOM*, 134-138.

⁸⁵Schwartz, 757.

⁸⁶See Maurice Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England*. 2 Volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980-1985), 2: 336.

influence Dawson's own conversion. His relationship with Valery Mills, a Roman Catholic whom he would later marry, would also ease his concerns with changing faiths. Helplessly romantic, before they met in 1909, Dawson had seen a picture of her and immediately fell deeply in love. Because of the sensitivity surrounding her being a Roman Catholic, he kept his love for her private, telling no one except Watkin.

In spite of his convictions and his relationship with Valery Mills, by 1911 Dawson had not yet joined the Roman Catholic Church. He spent the autumn of that same year working in Sweden with the Professor of Economics, Gustav Cassell, whereby he attempted to fulfill his father's dream that he should enter a life of politics. After a couple of months Dawson returned home to take a job as a private secretary to Arthur Steel-Maitland, a Conservative Member of Parliament. Yet it did not take long for everyone involved to realize that, in the words of Scott, 'a political career was a completely misguided idea' as Dawson was developing very different ambitions from those of his father.⁸⁷

In 1912, Watkin wrote in his diary that he 'found Christopher's tendencies of thought more pronounceably [*sic*] orthodox than ever.' He continued, 'I hope he may yet be a Catholic [for] he is full of mysticism and history.'⁸⁸ Watkin's observation that Dawson was 'full of mysticism and history' reveals how significant historical theology was to all his decision making. Historical and theological continuity with the founding of the Church by the apostles became the aim of his search for social and religious authority. All signs pointed to Rome as the authority that had given Europe and the West its progressive impulse.

⁸⁷Scott, *Historian*, 57.

⁸⁸Edward Watkin quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 57.

Dawson was led to this conclusion through Troeltsch's *Social Teachings of the Christian Churches* (1912). It was this publication that fully convinced Dawson of this essential part of the 'psyche' of Western culture. Troeltsch's relativism was adopted by Dawson because it obeyed the 'critical history' of Harnack while at the same time, it managed to support the notion of a 'truth for us' that pointed to a social authority beyond the Enlightenment's naive approach to the universality of truth embodied in autonomous reason.⁸⁹ Yet beyond the relativity was what he believed to be a universality of religious experience whereby 'there is no essential difference between the mysticism of the medieval Germans, of the early Christians of Syria and Egypt, of the Sufis of Persia and of the ascetics of India and the Far East.'⁹⁰ Religion, not the rigid rationalism of the eighteenth century, formed the basis for a universal vision of the progress of human knowledge for, in the truest of Romantic terms, 'mysticism is simply Natural Theology translated from the bare knowledge of the Reason, to the living experience of the Spirit and the Emotion.'⁹¹ Dawson believed that Christian mysticism and the Catholic tradition in general were vital both to the West's past and to its future progress. Troeltsch's sociological study of Christianity convinced Dawson that while other Christian communions retained elements of Christian culture, it was in Catholicism that it was truest, for, in the words of Newman, the Church has 'accompanied human society through one revolution of its great year ... she has passed through the full cycle of changes in order to show that she is independent of them all. She has had trial of East and West, of monarchy and democracy, of peace and war, of times of

⁸⁹ Welch, 'Confidence and Questions,' 150.

⁹⁰ Dawson quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 56.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

darkness and times of philosophy, of old countries and young.’⁹² By the time he was twenty-four, Dawson was convinced of the apostolic claims of Rome.

Dawson made the decision to convert late in 1913 and soon after asked Valery to be his wife. Valery had sensed her own ‘divine calling’ during a meeting with Pope Pius X in 1912: she believed that it was God’s will that she marry Dawson, even though both sides of the family would oppose it.⁹³ He was accepted into the Church the following year, thereby ending his long search and beginning his new life as a Catholic. It was a tremendously difficult decision to make as it was interpreted by his family as, at best, a betrayal of family tradition and, at worst, as an act of treason. He did find solace, however, when he read how difficult Newman’s conversion had been. ‘When Newman was brought face to face with the necessity for a decision,’ Scott recalled about her father’s empathy with Newman’s struggle, ‘that he found this “exceedingly hard to make and it took him four years of agonizing intellectual and moral examination to sever the links that bound him so closely to the Church of England and the University of Oxford.” Christopher had much the same problem: he felt strongly bound to his family affiliations and his Anglican past and he took at least two years to make up his mind to take this irrevocable step.’⁹⁴

From an historical point of view, Dawson credited Harnack and his *History of Dogma* with clarifying one very important element in his search for the true apostolic Church: ‘Harnack ... never knew how much he contributed to the process of my conversion to the Catholic Church!’ he reflected. ‘He had never heard of me,

⁹² John Henry Newman quoted in Russello (ed.), *Christianity and European Culture: Selections from the Work of Christopher Dawson* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 131.

⁹³ Scott, *Historian*, 60.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

of course, but I wonder if it ever occurred to him that he might have helped anyone along that particular road.⁹⁵ It was the theologian's writings on the Protestant Reformation that convinced Dawson, as with Newman before him, that the Reformation was a break with the historical faith and tradition.

On a related point, Dawson also credited as reasons for his conversion the Catholic Church's stand against modernity and the liberalism which he believed was so threatening to long-held traditions and customs, and – ironically – human liberty. According to Schwartz, Roman Catholicism substantiated his sense of being a 'rebel and prophet against modernity.'⁹⁶ Psychologically, his new found faith reestablished the sense of legitimate authority that had disappeared when he left the security of Craven. Schwartz continues:

Roman Catholicism's emphasis on authority, culminating in the institution of the Papacy, allowed Dawson to reintegrate two esteemed principles of his childhood that had been sundered for years. Since his schooldays, he had seen authority and religion as antithesis, but with his conversion they were harmonized again. Dawson's reception, therefore, restored the psychological unity of his youth.⁹⁷

With many of his questions answered and his mind resting in his new-found authority, Dawson set out on his mission to write his ambitious five-volume history of culture. It was not long, however, until another crisis would make his sense of peace and security short lived: the First World War.

⁹⁵Dawson quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 63.

⁹⁶Schwartz, 735.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 770.

Part Two

Historian of Culture 1915-1929

Preparation

According to his future wife Valery, when war was declared in 1914, Dawson's greatest fear was not that he would end up fighting on the continent but the possibility that he would be assigned to administrative work on the home front.¹ Much to Dawson's relief, he would not be forced to endure the trenches, and his administrative work in the Admiralty only lasted for a brief period of time. Diagnosed by the medical examiner at the Cowley Barracks as having a dismal 'Grade III' condition, he was disqualified from military service by his perpetually poor health, officially ending the possibility of an extension of the celebrated Dawson family military tradition. Not only did his health disqualify him from military service but, in the opinion of his physician, Sir William Osler, it made him incapable of holding any full-time occupation. Later in life, Dawson put his weak constitution into perspective, however, by claiming that he, like Gibbon, had been allotted his condition 'providentially,' allowing for the domesticity needed to write books.²

¹Scott, *Historian*, 66.

²*Ibid.*, 66-68.

In spite of the physician's pessimistic prognosis, Dawson took a teaching post in a Franciscan school at Cowley which counted as war-work and therefore saved him from the administrative work he was so desperate to avoid. Although he welcomed this period of 'isolated study', the distance from his fiancé, who was living in Gloucestershire, was not so agreeable. After much disputation from both families, they married on 9 August 1916 and moved to London where Dawson fulfilled administrative duties until the end of the war. The relative security when the war ended gave Dawson the opportunity to begin publishing some of the products of his intensive study over the course of the previous decade.

Fourteen years of research had brought Dawson into contact with a considerable number of scholars and their ideas, both past and contemporary. Like Baron Friedrich von Hügel, Dawson admitted that he had learned very little 'by his own nose.'³ Perhaps more than most intellectuals, then, he was aware of his debt to the giants on whose shoulders he stood and was therefore always ready to give credit to those who helped him to form his own thought. The lists of names were always extensive and included historians, sociologists, anthropologists, theologians, essayists, and philosophers. In a letter to a former student, Daniel O'Connor, he wrote that Aristotle's *Politics* were foundational to his political and social ideas while he was a student at Oxford. By 1915 Dawson was well versed in St. Augustine's work and it was this patristic tradition that determined his approach to medieval history. The letter also reveals that, more than influencing his conversion to Catholicism, German Historicists such as Troeltsch and Weber shaped his approach to history. In another letter written in 1954, Dawson added to this list of German thinkers the historian Gottfried Herder whose historicism, in the

³Baron Friedrich von Hügel, *Letters to a Niece* (London: Fount Classics, 1995), 3.

words of one historian, 'initiated a keen awareness of the variety of human values [but] tended to lead to a negation of universal human values.'⁴ From Herder, Dawson learned that 'the literature of a culture was the best avenue for arriving at a culture's "soul."'⁵ After the war, Dawson began to study sociology and was influenced by French sociologists such as Friedrich LePlay, at first through the Geddes-Branford school in England.

Although Dawson had recognized early in his life that culture was vital to understanding history, the claim of Darwinians such as Huxley and Spencer, that sociological phenomena was rooted in biology, was not only incompatible with his Catholic faith, but was altogether too reductionist given the findings of anthropologists in the early twentieth century.⁶ Dawson's correspondence with John Mulloy suggests that he had a rather difficult time relating sociology to his understanding of history. In a rather confusing paragraph from one of these letters (which appears to contradict his letter to Daniel O'Connor in terms of chronology⁷) he outlined the changes in his perspective about the schools to which he looked for insight, and wrote:

You must remember that the Geddes-Branford sociology was purely French by origin and with rather an anti-German bias. It represents a synthesis of Comte-LePlay-Bergson, with a strong inclination to biological terms and explanations. (Geddes was a biologist and a close friend of Sir Arthur Thomson.) I diverged from them, first by my sympathy with the German tradition, i.e., Herder instead of Montesquieu, and in more recent time Troeltsch and Weber. Secondly, by going back from Comte to the St. Simonians and Catholic social thinkers from whom

⁴Dawson to John Mulloy, 4 July 1954, as quoted in Reyes, 21. Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 9.

⁵Reyes, 25.

⁶The place of sociology in his idea of history will be given more attention when *The Age of the Gods* and *Progress and Religion* are discussed later in this chapter.

⁷See previous page.

Comte himself had taken so much. In the case of the St. Simonians I have always regarded Bazard's *Doctrine of St. Simon* as the real starting point of modern sociology (and I believe it owed more to Bazard than to St. Simon.)

On the other hand, I agreed entirely with Geddes in the value he attached to Aristotle, and he owed this not to Comte but to his own biological studies Thus my study of sociology was conditioned by my earlier humanist studies, and the Geddes-Branford school had reached the same point from the opposite direction, i.e., from biological and geographical science to a humanist sociology.⁸

The extent of Dawson's 'sympathy with the German tradition' remains unclear, even if it is one of the most important aspects of the academic approach of his historiography. In order to find an answer to this question, the topic demands more attention than can be given here, and would be a worthwhile area for future consideration. Yet it is clear from even a glimpse at his publications in the 1920s that while he says very little about the methods themselves, his views were shaped by several assumptions which characterized German thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, most notably German historicism. A brief survey of the school of thought, then, is necessary to any attempt to explain Dawson's earliest historiography.

As vague as it is controversial, 'historicism' is an elusive term. In his book *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, the historian Georg Iggers notes that to see historicism as solely as a 'theory of history' is erroneous. Although such a connection is true in part, instead it should be understood as 'a total philosophy of life, a unique combination of a conception of science, specifically of the human or cultural sciences, and a conception of the political and social order.'⁹ While one does well to heed Iggers' correction, the role of history in philosophy should not be underestimated. 'The central idea in historicism,' another historian has written, 'is

⁸ *Ibid.*, as quoted in Reyes, 21.

⁹ Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, 29.

that all cultures are moulded by history.’¹⁰ ‘The name “historicism,”” he continues, ‘bears witness to this conviction that the customs and beliefs of any group are the products of the group’s historical experience.’¹¹ In the most extreme cases, Historicists believed that long-held epistemological doctrines had to be dismantled. Such was the belief of Friedrich Meinecke, who contended that ‘the chief obstacle to historical understanding was the doctrine of natural law.’ In the words of Iggers, Meinecke believed that ‘before the life quality of history in its individuality and spontaneity could be understood, the two-thousand-year-old hold of the Stoic-Christian natural law faith in a static, rational world order had to be broken.’¹² However, whatever the range of opinions within the historicist school, it remains essentially a reactionary movement which attempted to extend notions of *episteme* to include often disregarded ideas about the extent of human knowledge, the nature of culture and traditions, and the essence of history itself. Differences did exist between Dawson’s views and the historicist school, most notably the centrality of the nation state to the historical process, but there are several good reasons for drawing connections between the two.

First of all, as the preceding chapter noted, Dawson, like many English speaking historians before him, had travelled to Germany in order to immerse himself in the language.¹³ In Germany he discovered writers who were obviously shaped by historicism, and who immediately impressed him with their openness to the religious character of history. From the insights of the historicists like Leopold

¹⁰David Bebbington, *Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1970), 92.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 92.

¹²Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, 31.

¹³See Novick, 30.

von Ranke, history was understood as fundamentally religious, and as recognising 'something infinite in every existence: in every condition, in every being, something eternal, coming from God,' in contrast with the philosopher who 'seeks infinity merely in progression, development, and totality.'¹⁴ This understanding of history was consistent with Dawson's own impressions as a child, as well as his views later in life when he credited Ranke with having been a model for his own approach to history.¹⁵ Like his German predecessor, Dawson highlighted the importance of 'intuitive understanding, creative imagination, and ... a universal vision transcending the relative limitations of the particular field of history.' He further claimed that 'the experience of the great historians such as Tocqueville and Ranke leads me to believe that ... a vision ... partaking more of the nature of religious contemplation than of scientific generalization, lies very close to the sources of their creative power.'¹⁶

A second reason for drawing a connection between the Dawson and the historicist school lies in the fact that his tutor, Sir Ernest Barker, was influenced by nineteenth-century historicism, especially its Romantic elements. Making the connection between Barker and historicism, David Bebbington writes:

The aspect of historicism that entered the British historical tradition was its delight in the colour and variety of past ages. The chief influence making for a romantic view of history in Britain was not a historian but a novelist, Sir Walter Scott. The appreciation of mediaeval culture that Germany owed to Herder, Britain owed to Scott. It was ... Scott who fired the imagination of Macaulay and of many subsequent British historians like Sir Ernest Barker.¹⁷

¹⁴Leopold von Ranke, 'On the Character of Historical Science,' in Leopold von Ranke, *The Theory and Practice of History*, Georg G. Iggers and Conrad von Moltke (eds.) (Indianapolis, 1973), 38, as quoted in Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, 25.

¹⁵See *DWH*, 287.

¹⁶*DWH*, 287.

¹⁷Bebbington, 107.

Dawson admitted later in life that Barker was a key figure in the formation of his historical thought because he had elevated his fascination with the romantic elements of the Historicist school.¹⁸ Even with the influence of Scott and Barker, it would appear that Dawson had a more direct line to Germany. As was mentioned earlier, he became convinced of many of the 'historicist' assumptions through the writings of Herder himself.

Lastly, Dawson clearly had an affinity with the *cri du coeur* of historicists: their attempt to expand the narrow epistemological notions of the Enlightenment with which he had problems, most notably in its rigid and reductionist view of history. Fairly compatible with the Christian view of history, historicism recognized 'the limitations of intellect in the understanding of human reality' and took seriously the insights of tradition, religion, and the general social experience of thousands of people, all of whom were ignored as worthy of study by generations of 'universalistic' Western historians who saw their own civilization as the pinnacle of human development and progress.¹⁹ Dawson's own recognition of the importance of the very subjective mystical elements of knowledge throughout history and the centrality of religion to understanding the historical process was compatible with the historicist line of thinking, making it, in his mind, a more authentic view of the past. Yet it is also clear that in spite of his affinity with many elements of the German school, he clearly rejected the tendency among German historians such as Hegel to make the nation state the source of divine authority.

The religious character of history was central for Dawson and it was only natural, then, that he should devote more time to study sociologists who took

¹⁸Scott, *Historian*, 44.

¹⁹Novick, 26.

seriously human culture and religious belief. In the years following the war, he watched intently the convergence of history, sociology, and anthropology in post-war scholarship, hoping that sociologists would be able to put a scientific voice to the German sense of the religious within history. If historicists were able to expand historical knowledge and ensured that the poetic nature of history could be realized, sociologists and anthropologists were beginning to take the religious elements *within* historical events to be equally valued. Before he had worked through the sociological issues, however, Dawson was, by 1920, prepared to leave the security of his study and life as a *Privategelehrter* and publish his first article.

An Augustinian Interpretation of History: 'The Nature and Destiny of Man' (1920)

Written for an anthology of theological articles entitled *God and the Supernatural*, 'The Nature and Destiny of Man' is an important introduction to Dawson's later ideas, because it sets the polemical tone through the clear, if not yet fully developed, theological, philosophical, and sociological premises of his future publications.²⁰ 'There is a point,' he wrote,

at which the world of spirit comes into conscious contact with the world of matter. That point is man. It is in the highest degree unreasonable to limit the whole world of spirit to its manifestation in the human mind, and to conceive of the universe as a vast material cosmos in which a solitary fragment of spiritual being exists in the case of one reasonable and moral creature. It is surely more rational to suppose that the world of thought and of spiritual values, on the threshold of which man has the consciousness of standing, is a real world, an order no less great than the material order, and that it is in this alone that we shall find a solution to the otherwise hopeless conflict between man's spiritual aspirations and the limitations of his material existence.²¹

Humanity's destiny – essentially a heroic one – is to bear the weight created by the tension between the two worlds by resisting the brutish 'law of animal nature' and

²⁰ Christopher Dawson, 'The Nature and Destiny of Man' in *God and the Supernatural*, Fr. Cuthbert O. F. S. C. (ed.) (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920). Republished in *ERC*. This fitting description of Dawson's rigorous and solitary study habits is used by Joseph F. Kelly in his 'Review of *Christianity and European Culture*', *Historian*, vol.62, issue 4 (Summer 2000), 939.

²¹ Dawson, 'Nature and Destiny,' 319.

recognizing 'another law' of 'a higher good which is independent of himself, a good that is unlimited, ideal, spiritual.'²²

Not only did *The Nature and Destiny of Man* set the tone for Dawson's later works; it also demonstrated the Platonic basis for Dawson's hypothesis about reality and his neo-Platonic Augustinian interpretation of history. From a philosophical standpoint, Plato's dualistic approach to reality both legitimized and explained Dawson's childhood notions of a higher reality beyond the material. The religious character of Platonic duality was transfigured with fundamentally religious elements when neo-Platonists such as Plotinus, and later St. Augustine, incorporated it into the Judeo-Christian tradition of the redemptive character of time. According to Dawson, it is humanity's religious impulse that has been the means to creativity, inspiration and the overall progress of knowledge. It is this sense of living in the shadow of the ideal that drives humanity to know and understand phenomena and the reality around them.

Building on St. Augustine's theology of history and in response to the rigid dualism of Plato where the gulf between idea and form is eternal, Dawson's dualism is one in which time is slowly moving towards the realization of the ideal. 'Man is a bridge,' he wrote, and 'the lower world is in some sense dependent on him for its spiritualization and its integration in the universal order.'²³ Accordingly, the purpose of history is ultimately redemptive, the dynamic process created by the interaction of these two realms. Yet unlike the utopia of Marx and absolute self-realization of Hegel, Dawson believed that the culmination of history

²²*Ibid.*, 316.

²³Dawson, 'Nature and Destiny,' 315.

is a mystery in which the solution is confounded by what one author has aptly termed 'the tension between history and its ends.'²⁴

Dawson believed that the character of time and the duality of the human experience between the temporal and spiritual grounded these philosophical notions in a concrete and demonstrable process of human development. The study of world cultures through sociology and anthropology was expanding his contemporaries' knowledge of the unity of the whole of humanity's experience. Parallels between cultures abounded in scholarly research, and with these parallels came the ability to analyse forces behind the expansion and contraction of human knowledge in relation to its environment, most notably religious experience. Troeltsch had influenced tremendously Dawson's sense that world history had a 'rational meaning and (was) motivated by an invincible ethical driving force,' which would continue to provide a reason to continue believing in the possibility of ascertaining that rational meaning.²⁵

It is not surprising, then, that this merger between theology and sociological anthropology captured the imagination of Dawson who was, to all intents and purposes, on an apologetic mission to dismantle the secular world view of his contemporaries who saw religion as destructive and divisive rather than constructive and unifying.²⁶ The articles that followed 'The Nature and Destiny of Man' were concerned primarily with sociological themes and in them he attempted to chart the development of cultures through progress and decay. Central to many of these articles was his use of Weber's analysis of Protestantism and

²⁴Costello, 126.

²⁵Otto Hintze, 'Troeltsch und die Probleme des Historismus' as quoted in Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, 174.

²⁶See Gerald Russello, 'The Relevance of Christopher Dawson', *First Things*, (April 2002).

industrialism. Industrialism, Dawson argued, and the liberal ideals and capitalism responsible for it, created an imbalance in the relationship between humankind and the environment, signifying the cultural atrophy in Western civilization. Like many Catholics, and non-Catholics such as William Cobbett and Thomas Carlyle, he despised industrialism as an enemy of culture and a symbol of the persistent greed of *laissez-faire* capitalism. This would become a common theme in most of his subsequent works.

Arguably the most important article that followed 'The Nature and Destiny of Man' was 'Herr Spengler and the Life of Civilizations', written in 1922, in which Dawson answered Spengler's sociology of history as expressed in *The Decline of the West*, challenging it with his own knowledge of the biological character of culture.²⁷ Over the next several years, Dawson averaged three articles each year, over half of which were published in Geddes' journal, *The Sociological Review*. These articles would form the basis for his next two books.²⁸ By 1928, Dawson believed the time was ripe for the publication of his first book and the first volume in his history of culture, *The Age of the Gods*.

²⁷This will be considered in chapter 7 as the review of Spengler's work was republished in Dawson's book *Progress and Religion*. For the full citation of this articles see the following footnote.

²⁸Of the sixteen articles he published between 1920 and 1927, ten appeared in *The Sociological Review*. They include: 'The Passing of Industrialism,' *The Sociological Review*, no. 12 (1920): 6-17; 'On the Development of Sociology in Relation to the Theory of Progress,' *The Sociological Review*, no. 13 (1921): 75-83; 'Cycles of Civilizations,' *The Sociological Review*, no. 14 (1922): 51-68; 'Herr Spengler and the Life of Civilizations,' *The Sociological Review*, no. 14 (1922): 194-201; 'Rome: a Historical Survey,' *The Sociological Review*, no. 15 (1923): 132-147; 296-312; 'Progress and Decay in Ancient and Modern Civilizations,' *The Sociological Review*, no. 16 (1924): 1-11; 'Scheme of British Culture Periods, and of their Relation to European Culture Development,' *The Sociological Review*, no. 16 (1924): 117-125; 'Religion and Primitive Culture,' *The Sociological Review*, no. 17 (1925): 105-119; 'Civilization and Morals,' *The Sociological Review*, no. 17 (1925): 174-181; 'The Mystery of China,' *The Sociological Review*, no. 19 (1927): 279-303. By 1927, Dawson was publishing at least an article a year for *The Dublin Review*, the journal of he would become editor by 1940.

The Age of the Gods (1928)

The introduction to the first book of his five-volume history of culture reveals that, when compared with other writers of the early twentieth century such as Spengler, Dawson was remarkably optimistic about the future, even if he did recognize the seemingly insurmountable challenges facing Europe and Western civilization in general.²⁹ History was essentially a development of the human mind and, as he stated in 'The Nature and Destiny of Man,' Western civilization was capable of renewal through a regeneration and restoration of the timeless elements at the heart of a dynamic culture. Dawson was convinced that the study of the past could reveal this and after centuries of intellectual and cultural erosion, the nineteenth-century developments in history, sociology, and anthropology foreshadowed a revolution in the way intellectuals understood the past. 'During the last thirty years,' he wrote in his introduction to the book,

the great development of archaeological and ethnological studies has prepared the way for a new conception of history. The historian is to-day working hand in hand with the archaeologist, while on the other hand, the anthropologist and the ethnologist are more and more developing the historical methods which were so completely neglected by the older evolutionary school. Thus we are witnessing the rise of a new science which will study man's past, not as an inorganic mass of isolated events,

²⁹See Roland Stromberg, *European Intellectual History Since 1789* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994), 188-193; 199-203.

but as the manifestations of the growth and mutual interaction of living cultural wholes.³⁰

Dawson's purpose for writing the book was to 'make a brief survey of the whole problem of the origins of our civilisation from the standpoint of the new methods.'³¹ Although he was influenced by the historicist school, Dawson shared neither their cultural relativism nor their nationalistic approach to history. In fact, he hoped that the pernicious elements of nationalism at the heart of the First World War and the search for peace and unity in the years that followed marked the end of the nationalistic claims of many of the key historians within the historicist school. He wrote:

During the last two centuries the history of Europe has been given an almost exclusively national interpretation. And since the unit is a political one, the method of interpretation has tended to be political also, so that history has often sunk to the level of political propaganda and even some of the greatest of nineteenth century historians – such as Macaulay, Froude, Treitschke, even Mommsen himself – have been unashamed political partisans.³²

Dawson observed that the use of the nation state as the central point of reference for historical study was 'one of the great predisposing causes of [World War One].'³³ His hope was that 'a general framework' of history, built on a sociological interpretation of Europe's origins, would be a means to securing what had become, through the efforts of the League of Nations, an insecure peace. After considering the League's faltering attempt to restore order to Europe, he wrote: 'It is certain that the peoples of Europe will never be able to co-operate in peace, so long as they have no knowledge of their common cultural tradition and no

³⁰ *AG*, v.

³¹ *Ibid.*, xii-xiii.

³² *Ibid.*, xiii.

³³ *Ibid.*, xiii.

revelation of the unity of European civilization.’³⁴ The modern tendency to emphasize national unity masked an even more significant unity that transcended national identities: the late Medieval and Renaissance ideals of Europe as a culturally united Christendom. Like many historicists who understood history as a collection of epochs each held together by a common experience, Dawson believed that European unity had to be reestablished at the most fundamental level of order. He understood this level to be psychological, and one based on any group’s collective history.

In order to articulate fully the significance of a group’s culture for its unity, Dawson recommended a revision of traditionally held notions about the word ‘culture.’³⁵ The Western sense of superiority in the modern era had turned the word ‘culture’ into the means by which civilizing could take place. To be ‘cultured’ was to be ‘civilized’; to be ‘civilized’ was to have escaped the illiteracy and vulgarity of barbarism. The sense that a revision of the term was needed was not unique to Dawson but had roots in the nineteenth-century reaction to modern industrialism. ‘The sense of “culture” as “a whole way of life” has been most marked in twentieth-century anthropology and sociology ...The development of social anthropology has tended to inherit and substantiate the ways of looking at a society and a common life which had earlier been wrought out from general experience of industrialism [as expressed by] Coleridge and Carlyle.’³⁶ Dawson’s own response was that ‘a culture is [merely] a common way of life – a particular adjustment of

³⁴*Ibid.*, xiii.

³⁵See Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963).

³⁶Williams, 229.

man to his natural surroundings and his economic needs.’³⁷ It is in turn a way of life that is based on common traditions that unify the members of a society.³⁸ The formation of a culture, he explained, is a dynamic process of interaction between its various elements. Dawson highlighted several ‘main influences’ which ‘form and modify human culture.’³⁹ These were: ‘(1) race, i.e. the genetic factor; (2) environment, i.e. the geographical factor; (3) function or occupation, i.e. the economic factor.’ Each of these factors is shared with all species and makes humans very much a part of the material process. Echoing his thesis on ‘The Nature and Destiny of Man’, Dawson identified a fourth factor which is unique to the human species: ‘the psychological factor.’⁴⁰ ‘It is this factor,’ he wrote, ‘which renders possible the acquisition of a growing capital of social tradition, so that the gains of one generation can be transmitted to the next, and the discoveries or new ideas of an individual can become the common property of the whole society.’ He added to this thought: ‘The formation of a culture is due to the interaction of all these factors; it is a four-fold community – for it involves in varying degrees a community of work and a community of thought as well as a community of place and a community of blood.’⁴¹ He noted further that it was the latter community of ‘blood’ or race that he believed was the ‘dominant’ and most dangerous factor that was being emphasized in his day and led to faulty notions of race as the ‘*deus ex*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, xiii.

³⁸ See William Speck, ‘The Role of the Christian Historian in the Twentieth Century as seen in the Writings of Herbert Butterfield, Kenneth Scott Latourette, and Christopher Dawson’ (Florida State University: PhD dissertation, unpublished, 1965), 105.

³⁹ *AG*, xiv.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, xiv.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, xiv.

machina of the human drama.’⁴² Anticipating the racism of the 1930s and 1940s, he warned that ‘any attempt to explain social development in terms of one of these to the exclusion of the rest leads to the error of racial or geographical or economic determinism or to no less false theories of abstract intellectual progress.’⁴³

In the second half of his introduction to the book, Dawson listed the various reasons for cultural development and progress. ‘In spite of this tendency towards the fixation of culture in unchanging social types, it is impossible to deny the reality and importance of cultural progress.’ The movement of the progress is cyclical in character but ultimately linear.⁴⁴ Dawson’s notion of a spiral historical process was not dissimilar to that of Giambattista Vico, a ‘proto-historicist’ who, like Dawson, delighted in the ‘variety of human customs, languages and cultures moulded by history.’⁴⁵ According to Iggers, Vico believed that ‘the history of mankind ... appeared as a clue to general truths about mankind. Every historical epoch has its place in the recurrent cycles (*corso* and *ricorso*) which make up the upward spiral of history.’⁴⁶ Although he would develop further his defence of progress in *Progress and Religion* (1929), Dawson did state that ‘progress is not ... as the philosophers of the eighteenth century believed, a continuous and uniform movement, common to the whole human race, and as universal and necessary as a

⁴² *Ibid.*, xiv. Cf. Christopher Dawson, ‘Interracial Cooperation as a Factor of European Culture’ (Reale Accademia D’Italia: Convegno Volta, 1932).

⁴³ *AG*, xiv.

⁴⁴ The cyclical nature of history was a common theme of several of his earliest articles. See ‘Cycles of Civilizations’ *The Sociological Review* no. 14 (1922): 51-68. Reprinted in *ERC*; ‘Progress and Decay in Ancient and Modern Civilisations’ *The Sociological Review* no. 16 (1924): 1-11. Reprinted in *DWH.*; ‘Scheme of British Culture Periods, and of their Relation to European Culture Development’ *The Sociological Review* no. 16 (1924): 117-125. ‘Religion and the Life of Civilisation’ *The Quarterly Review* no. 244 (1925): 98-115. Reprinted in *ERC* and *DWH.*

⁴⁵ Bebbington, 97.

⁴⁶ Iggers, *German Conception of History*, 30.

law of nature.' 'Just as civilisation itself is not a single whole,' he continued, 'but a generalisation from a number of historic cultures each with its own limited life, so Progress is an abstract idea derived from a simplification of the multiple and heterogeneous changes through which the historic societies have passed.'⁴⁷

'The importance of the Psychological factor is not confined to purely intellectual knowledge,' he wrote, but rather 'it is manifested equally in the religious outlook,' and 'every religion embodies an attitude to life and a conception of reality, and any change in these brings with it a change in the whole character of the culture, as we see in the case of the transformation of ancient civilization by Christianity, or the transformation of the society of Pagan Arabia by Islam.' Dawson concluded his introduction with the following insight about the development of the human experience:

The great stages of world-culture are linked with changes in man's vision of Reality. The primitive condition of food-gathering and hunting peoples does not necessarily imply reasonable purpose or any reflective vision of Reality; consequently it does not imply civilisation. The dawn of true civilisation came only with the discovery of natural laws, or rather the possibility of man's fruitful co-operation with the powers of Nature. This was the foundation of the primitive cultures of Elam and Babylonia and Egypt. To it belongs the discovery of the higher agriculture, the working of metals and the invention of writing and the calendar, together with the institutions of kingship and priesthood and an organised state.⁴⁸

The main body of the book includes an extensive analysis of cultural interaction and development. From 'The Glacial Age and the Beginnings of Human Life in Europe' to the 'Beginnings of the Iron Age,' Dawson makes use of close to five hundred books written by sociologists and anthropologists. The comprehensive character of the book attracted a considerable amount of attention from his contemporaries. Indeed, *The Age of the Gods* was widely read, reviewed,

⁴⁷ AG, xvi.

⁴⁸ AG, xx.

and acclaimed by the overwhelming number of those who reviewed it.⁴⁹ Although more than a few reviewers claimed that the book was impenetrable and ‘so confused that none save a scholar who has already acquired a clear understanding of pre-history could possibly arrive at any formed conclusion by means of it,’ only a few writers out of over forty harshly criticized the book.⁵⁰ The philosophical scepticism in the years following World War One was in no way reflected in the reviews as they, with Dawson, believed that a new era had dawned in the ability to know the past. His challenge for a cultural interpretation of history was readily accepted by most and his ability to create a synthesis of a vast amount of information astounded even the most critical of reviews.⁵¹ A writer for *The Nation* spoke for many of the reviews when he wrote that ‘[*The Age of the Gods*] is, in our opinion, a long way the best of several attempts which have been made lately to

⁴⁹ Reviews of *The Age of the Gods* include: R. N. Bradely, *Egyptian Mail*, 23 July 1929; Frank A. Clement, ‘A Study in Pre-History’, *The Outlook*, 28 April 1928; E. N. Fallaize, ‘Prehistoric Culture’, *Discovery*, June 1928; Albert Helman, *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 31 March 1933; Gregory Mason, ‘Origins of Culture’, *New York Times*, 18 November 1928; W. J. Perry, *Sociological Review*, 1928; E.G.H., ‘The Dawn of History’, *Daily Telegraph*, 4 May 1928; *Cape Argus*, 2 June 1928; *Western Mail*, 15 March 1928; *Times of India*, 29 June 1928; ‘Cave Art and the Beginnings of Civilized Behaviour’, *The Queen*, 2 January 1929; M.C., *Guardian*, 28 April, 1933; *Dawlish Gazette* 14 April 1929; *The Nation*, 5 May 1928; *Boston Evening Transcript*, 4 August 1928; *Madras Mail*, 11 May 1928; *Natal Mercury*, 28 May 1928; *New Statesman*, 12 May 1928; *Month*, October 1933; *The Times Literary Supplement*, 9 February 1933; ‘Culture, Race, and Art’ *Scotsman*, 26 April 1928; *The Star*, November 1928; J. M. R. ‘The Birth and Growth of Religion’, *Literary Guide*, September 1928; B. W. ‘Story of Culture Evolution: Plea for Wider View of Function of History’, *Western Morning News*, 22 October 1928; *Adelaide Register*, 23 June 1928; *West Australian*, 28 May 1928; *The Guardian*, 25 May 1928; *Liverpool Post*, 26 May 1928; *The Argus*, 26 May 1928; *Truth*, 11 April 1928; ‘Culture and Race’, *Birmingham Post*, 20 April 1928; *Daily Mail*, Brisbane, 21 April 1928; *The Bulletin*, Sydney 22 August 1928; *The Queenslander*, 15 March 1928; *Asiatic Review*, July 1928; *Vancouver Sun*, 7 April 1928; *Saturday Review*, 14 April 1928; *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 June 1928; ‘The Foundations of Civilization,’ *The Church Times* (1928): 283-284; ‘The Whole History of Man: A Searching Inquiry into the Origin of Races’ *The Star*, 29 June 1928; *North China Herald*, 2 June 1928; T. E. P., *Manchester Guardian*, 12 April 1928; *The Age*, Melbourne, 12 May 1928; S. A. D. ‘When Mankind was Young: A Summary of Pre-History’, *Irish Press*, 29 May 1933.

⁵⁰ ‘Peasants’ Legacy’, *Times of India*, Bombay 29 June 1928.

⁵¹ See for example ‘Fact, Fiction and Futility: Review of *The Age of the Gods*, by Christopher Dawson’. *Saturday Review*, London, 14 April 1928. Dawson responded to this criticism by writing a letter to the *Saturday Review*. In it Dawson wrote: ‘It is obviously difficult for an author to discuss all the views with which he does not agree, and I believe that even a work on so large a scale as the ‘Cambridge Ancient History’ does not deal with the hypothesis for the neglect of which your reviewer censures me.’ *Saturday Review*, 28 April 1928.

summarize the broad results of recent discoveries and theories. Mr. Dawson's scholarship is exact, cautious, and thoroughly up-to-date ... [his] absorbing book serves to show ... what a magnificent and intelligible story so-called pre-history has become.⁵² A reviewer for the *Daily Telegraph* praised the book but ended with a curious statement questioning Dawson on 'leaving us with the impression that the origins of civilization must be sought in Asia, and certainly not in the cold North.'⁵³ In so doing, it appears the reviewer had difficulty with Dawson's definition of culture and his refusal to champion Anglo-Saxon culture over all the others. The scholar W. J. Perry, whose work *The Growth of Civilization* (1924) was used as a source for the book, argued that 'those who wish for a good summary of ... the origin and development of early civilisation will find this to be the best available book.'⁵⁴

It was praise such as this from several of the leading scholars in the field that brought this relatively unknown scholar into contact with English historians and sociologists. Now that Dawson had projected the possibilities for progress in historical research, his next project attempted to address the pessimism about progress among philosophers and intellectuals that paralleled the optimism of the historical profession. His second book built on the themes of progress and culture which were only briefly discussed in the introduction to *The Age of the Gods*. Only time would tell if reviewers would speak as favourably about a book which was intended to be more apologetic in aim.

⁵²'The Origins of Culture', *The Nation*, 5 May 1928.

⁵³E. G. H., 'The Dawn of History', *Daily Telegraph*, London, 4 May 1928.

⁵⁴W. J. Perry, 'Review of *The Age of the Gods*, by Christopher Dawson', *Sociological Review*, 'Book Reviews,' no. 20 (1928).

Progress and Religion (1929)

Written at the same time he was preparing *The Age of the Gods* for publication, *Progress and Religion* was Dawson's introduction to his intended five-volume history of culture.⁵⁵ Christina Scott raised a very important point concerning the order in which his first two books were published: 'Why he published [*The Age of the Gods*] when his second work *Progress and Religion* was in fact the introductory volume to the whole work is not known.'⁵⁶ She suggested, 'He may have been advised that this more factual and less philosophical work would be more easily publishable as an unknown author's first book.'⁵⁷ Upon comparison of the two books, Scott's suggestion would appear to be in fact the reason for this choice on the part of Dawson and his publishers. *The Age of the*

⁵⁵Vera Brittain, 'Modern Europe Adrift', *Time & Tide*, 17 May 1929; Evelyn Underhill, 'A Philosophy of Civilization', *The Spectator*, 18 May 1929; 'Christianity and Culture', *Guardian*, 1929; Fernand Deschamps 'La Religion du Progrès' *La Metropoli* 20 Octobre 1935; Fernand Deschamps 'Progrès et Religion' *La Revue Catholique Des Idées et Des Faits* (date unknown) 15-19; G. R. Elliot, 'The Nature of Progress' *The American Review* (Date Unknown): 358-362; Edward Montier, Lyon 28 Juillet 1935; Marcel Pierrot, *Polybiblion*, Septembre 1935; A. G., *Nouvelles Littéraires*, 14 Septembre 1935; *Revue de France*, 15 Septembre 1935; *Gazette de Lausanne*, 21 Juillet 1935; *La Vie*, Paris 15 September 1935; Prager Press, 5 August 1935; *Europäische Kultureinheit*, 16 February 1936; 'Les Dix' 'Courrier littéraire et artistique' *Memorial de la Loire Saint-Etienne* 15 Juillet 1935; J. B. *Revue Des Vivants*, Septembre 1935; Chancellor Campbell, 'A Life of Jesus and Other Volumes', *Church of England Newspaper*, ? 1937; Donald Nicholl, 'Reason, Religion and Progress', *The Catholic Herald*, 31 May 1957.

⁵⁶Scott, *Historian*, 82.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 82.

Gods, based on the extensive bibliography of twenty-two pages, was a solid piece of scholarship, resting soundly on the efforts of a large number of scholars. In comparison, *Progress and Religion* is not only philosophical, as Scott noted, but theoretical as well, creating an apologetic framework for an account of sociological progress (and therefore a critique of Enlightenment notions of progress), a cultural interpretation of history, and the study of Western Civilization as one of many epics in the history of the world. The apologetic character of the books can be seen even in their titles which, to many readers in the 1920s, would have seen progress and religion as antithetical, a perception which Dawson obviously hoped to reverse.

Although *The Age of the Gods* reveals a certain level of affinity with German historicism, it was *Progress and Religion* that fully exposes Dawson's debt to the reactionary elements of the historicist school and the Romantics. Unlike many of his non-German contemporaries, Dawson was not fooled by Ranke's well-known dictum *wie es eigentlich gewesen* – 'as it essentially happened.'⁵⁸ That he understood Ranke's challenge to historians to capture the 'essence' of 'each epoch' is clear from the first paragraph of the book: 'Every period of civilization,' Dawson wrote, 'possesses certain characteristics that are peculiarly its own. They express the mind of the society that has given them birth, no less than does the artistic style or the social institutions of the age.'⁵⁹ Like Herder, he believed that 'so long as [the characteristics] are dominant, their unique and original character is never fully recognized, since they are accepted as principles of absolute truth and universal validity. They are looked on not as the popular ideas of the moment, but

⁵⁸For an excellent summary of misinterpretations of these and other German words by non-Germans, see Novick, 21-29.

⁵⁹*PR*, 13.

as eternal truth implanted in the very nature of things, and as self-evident in any kind of rational thinking.’⁶⁰

In spite of the bold claims of Enlightenment philosophers and scientists that they had refuted old notions of metaphysics with the revolutionary notion of *Nihil est in intellectu quod non antea fuerit in sensu*,⁶¹ they were no exceptions to the changes in the intellectual and social atmospheres of their own epoch. The idea of Progress, Dawson noted, was one such example, and its decline as a pervasive doctrine in the West points to ‘the close of that great epoch of civilization which embraced the 18th and 19th centuries, and the dawn of a new age.’⁶² Rather than a universal law, ‘progress’ as conceived by Enlightenment *philosophes* was a relative condition, an ‘exceptional and indeed unique achievement of a single society at a particular stage of its development.’ Bolstered by the absolute and undisputed character of Newtonian laws, the Enlightenment championed universal laws whereby Reason could ultimately free humanity from what they saw as unprogressive metaphysical assumptions. The Cartesian epistemology of deductive reasoning in philosophy and Napoleon’s attempt to ‘unite Europe under a single progressive law’ are the two clearest examples of this notion at work in both philosophy and politics.⁶³ The Romantic movement reacted against both, arguing that universal laws based on autonomous reason were both culturally null and philosophically untenable given the breadth of human traditions and experience. Dawson was thus sympathetic to Romanticism’s reaction against Enlightenment

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶¹ ‘There is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses.’ Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that Have Shaped Our World View* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), 333.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶³ Stromberg, 21.

notions of universality as a logical and indeed necessary correction of a rigid epistemology which 'ended in a kind of rational suicide by explaining itself away.'⁶⁴

The reaction against the strict universality of the Enlightenment view of the past was that 'for the first time men set themselves to re-create the past, and sought to enter with imaginative sympathy into the life and thought of past ages and of different peoples.'⁶⁵ *Verstehen*⁶⁶ – or *Sophia*⁶⁷ as Gottfried Arnold articulated it – was to be the primary goal of the historian, who, when using intuitive contemplation (*Anschauung*), would discover, as Ranke noted, the 'essence' of the period under study. In spite of this change in atmosphere, the Enlightenment doctrine of progress continued to pervade the perspective of intellectuals, especially in the newly-founded fields of sociology and anthropology.

Auguste Comte was the first to work out 'systematically the relation of Sociology to the other sciences.'⁶⁸ As the father of positivism, Comte denied 'all metaphysical and theological conceptions' which, rather than 'leading to materialism, finally ended in a religious system in which the temporal order would be subordinated to the Spiritual Power represented by the priests of Humanity and Progress, and both science and action would be consecrated to the service and worship of a quasi-transcendent Great Being.'⁶⁹ Comte's attempts to create a

⁶⁴PR, 27.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 28.

⁶⁶'Understanding'

⁶⁷Gottfried Arnold himself defined 'Sophia' as 'the power of the most Holy Trinity which at once reveals, transfigures and heralds.' P.H. Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism* (Berkeley, 1975), 225, as quoted in Bebbington, 98.

⁶⁸PR, 21.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 22-23.

genuine social science were compromised by his 'abstract view of humanity' and his refusal to embrace the theological elements which unified social development, a perspective embraced by later social scientists such as Friedrich LePlay.⁷⁰

Comte's search into the social experiences of humanity 'did not lead him, as one might have expected,' claimed Dawson,

to abandon the abstract ideas of Humanity, Progress and Civilization, and to concentrate his attention in the study of individuals and the particular societies. On the contrary, he held that the only reality was Humanity, and that the individual man was a pure abstraction – that all the observable changes of particular societies were conditioned by the law of progress, which was the ultimate fact of positive social science.⁷¹

This 'doctrine of evolution' was adopted by social scientists like Herbert Spencer who had an equally ahistorical approach to sociology and the development of culture. It was not until social scientists such as Friedrich LePlay that sociologists were at last able to 'free themselves from the vices of the older methods' and reject the absolute assumptions of the Enlightenment.

Following the evolutionary models of Spencer and Darwin, the first anthropologists, including D.G. Brinton, Lewis Morgan, and E.B. Tylor, attempted to demonstrate the reality of progress as the result of biological and mental improvements based on the notion of a 'universal man.' They believed, Dawson noted, 'that their new science supplied a series of general laws which explained the whole course of social evolution.'⁷² In such a view, he argued, the long process of historical events becomes secondary to the 'scientific' study of this notion of universality. Future anthropologists, of whom he noted Maitland, discovered that cultures and social development were infinitely more complex than the disciples of

⁷⁰ *PR*, 22.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 46.

the evolutionary school had assumed, primarily because of the influence of the reactionary German and Austrian schools of anthropologists who eschewed the evolutionary models and who developed a more objective *Kulturkreis*, an 'interrelated group of social phenomena,' to replace earlier assumptions of social stages of the 'universal law of progress.'⁷³ The Enlightenment intellectuals' abstract and universal interpretation of history perceived civilisation as 'something absolute and unique – a complete whole standing out in symmetrical perfection, like a temple by Poussin or Claude, against a background of Gothic confusion and Oriental barbarism.' This conception was being dismantled by a cultural interpretation of history as means to understanding the past.

In the discipline of history, the reaction in Germany against the Enlightenment led to an essentially religious vision of the past, sufficiently relativistic in its condemnation of the 'universal man' in favour of a more realistic approach to human history. The German model of history as a 'manifestation of a living spirit' attempted to change the 'limited outlook' of eighteenth-century historians who emphasised the accumulation of detail 'without giving heed to the informing spirit, which alone can give significance to the material circumstances.'⁷⁴ Dawson welcomed such changes, but he lamented the hijacking of this perspective by the engineers of state-building in countries such as Italy and Germany. Progress became directly related to the state, as seen in Hegel's dialectic, the genius of which was overshadowed by his 'deification of the state' which 'had disastrous effect on the later developments.' The 'disastrous effect', as Richard Evans explains, was that 'virtually all historians assumed that the nation-state was the primary object of historical study. The emerging historical profession

⁷³ *PR*, 48.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

was dominated by the view that the historian's task lay principally in the study of the origins and development of states and their relations to one another. Even the most narrow and rigorous of learned articles were usually written within this framework, while huge resources of scientific scholarship were lavished on the publications of vast documentary collections designed to provide the basic materials for national histories such as the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* and the Calenders of State Papers.⁷⁵ However, by ignoring the growing wealth of information from anthropology and the new perspectives of sociologists, the new conception of history which was tied so closely with nationalism became merely reactionary and destructive to the search for history as a unified and meaningful process. This was especially true during and after the Great War. Spengler's *The Decline of the West* was the clearest example of the growing relativism and scepticism leading to the decline of the idea of progress in the Western mind. For Spengler, the twentieth century was the closing of the great Western epic.

The Decline of the West was written in 1914 before the onset of the Great War, but was not published until 1918. During the 1920s it was translated into several languages and was enormously successful, as it reflected and magnified the pessimism of the period, not only among Germans but also among intellectuals throughout Europe. Spengler was one of the first to see the West as only one of many civilizations and not civilization in the absolute sense of the word, rejecting the notion of unity in history.⁷⁶ To him history contained no unity, only a collection of isolated and organic cultural epochs, one of which was the West. 'Spengler's closed cycles of cultural emergence and downfall,' Paul Costello writes, 'contain the frozen fascination of compelling tragedy, where an inevitably

⁷⁵Evans, 22. Cf. *PR*, 32-33.

⁷⁶Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, 7.

unfolding destiny prescribes the actions of the players toward the dramatic glories of their deaths.⁷⁷ Ultimately, Spengler claimed to fulfil Nietzsche's prophecy by demonstrating that history is 'a long tragic struggle.'⁷⁸

Although Dawson, like so many other intellectuals of the 1920s such as William Inge, Ezra Pound, H. G. Wells, and Aldous Huxley, was sympathetic to Spengler's *crie de coeur*, he harshly criticized *The Decline of the West* when he reviewed it for *The Sociological Review* in 1922.⁷⁹ Throughout his discussion of *The Decline of the West*, he dismissed many of the historiographical aspects of the book and noted that it was more literary and philosophical than historical, the 'logical, if extreme conclusion of a current of thought which reached back to the Romantic epoch.'⁸⁰ Moreover, in spite of Spengler's contribution to 'the transference of interest from political history to the comparative study of cultures,' Dawson maintained that Spengler actually used terms such as 'culture' and 'civilization' in an ahistorical manner, which Dawson hoped to correct by writing *The Age of the Gods* and *Progress and Religion*.⁸¹

Dawson was critical of Spengler's depreciation of 'Reason and scientific analysis,' and his failure to recognize obvious connections between the cultures made *The Decline of the West* anti-intellectual, unduly relativistic, and out of touch with advancements in the fields of anthropology, archaeology and sociology. Even

⁷⁷Costello, 46.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 64.

⁷⁹Christopher Dawson, 'Oswald Spenger and the Cycles of Civilizations', *The Sociological Review*, no. 14 (1922): 194-201. The review was republished as a chapter in *Progress and Religion* and later as a chapter in Mulloy (ed.) *Dynamics of World History*.

⁸⁰Christopher Dawson to John Mulloy, 4 July 1954 quoted in Charles B. Cushing, 'Christopher Dawson's Cultural Morphology' (St. John's University: PhD dissertation, unpublished, 1971), 10; *PR*, 33.

⁸¹*PR*, 33.

more problematic for Dawson were Spengler's parochial notions about race when he concluded that 'the roots of historical reality lie ... in "the blood."' ⁸² Such claims exposed Spengler's apparent inability to grasp the most basic elements of history – social interaction, diffusion and integration. 'If [the roots of historical change lie in "the blood"],' Dawson questioned, anticipating the racial creed of National Socialism, 'it is clear that culture is exclusively the result of racial growth, and owes nothing to Reason or to any tradition which transcends the limits of a single people's experience. For [then] each culture is a world to itself, hermetically sealed against every influence from without, and impenetrable to the eyes of the rest of the world. But this idea is irreconcilable with the whole course of human history, which is nothing but a vast system of intercultural relations.' ⁸³ These 'intercultural relations', rather than being a destructive reality of history as the Nazis purported, were actually the means by which human knowledge and experience, indeed history itself, accumulates and moves forward to a further realization of what Goethe called 'the invisible mystery' of history. ⁸⁴

In spite of this very philosophical – indeed theological – sense of the 'ends' of history, the use of philosophy as a means to consider the wholeness of the past is problematic. According to Dawson, Spengler's philosophy of history revealed such problems with attempts to explain meaning in history through philosophical reflection. Because philosophies of history are developed primarily from abstract reflection – or 'ideas' in the well-known philosophical insights of Collingwood – they tend to exaggerate the relative qualities of the historical process over the valuable insights gained from the concrete connections between seemingly

⁸² *PR*, 39.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

different periods and peoples.⁸⁵ 'The relativist philosophy of history,' Dawson concluded, 'ends by denying the very existence of relations, and dissolves the unity of history into an unintelligible plurality of isolated and sterile culture processes.'⁸⁶

Such was Dawson's concern with Collingwood's philosophy of history. Collingwood reviewed *The Decline of the West* for *Antiquity* in 1927 and criticized Spengler for not taking into consideration that his attempt to outline an objective account of cultural cycles of growth and decline is in reality merely a subjective reflection of his own position in history. 'We fabricate periods of history,' Collingwood wrote about Spengler's thesis, 'by fastening upon some, to us, particularly luminous point and trying to study it as it actually came into being. We find our mind caught, as it were, by some striking phenomenon – Greek life in the 5th century or the like; and this becomes the nucleus of a group of historical inquiries asking how it arose and how it passed away; what turned into it and what it turned into.'⁸⁷ Dawson was unimpressed by Collingwood's cleverly constructed paradox of the dialogue between history and the historian. According to Dawson, the growing collection of historical data made Collingwood's paradox of historical relativism a product of sceptical philosophizing rather than a legitimate observation through the study of the past. Dawson observed:

For while Spengler regards a culture as an unconscious physical life-process which can only be grasped by a kind of instinctive sense, Mr. Collingwood eliminates the physical and material aspects altogether, and treats cultural development as a purely spiritual movement of ideas.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ See, for example, Anthony F. Russell, *Logic, Philosophy and History: A Study in the Philosophy of History Based on the Work of R. G. Collingwood* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984). R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 272-274. Dawson's opinions of R. G. Collingwood's *The Idea of History* will be covered in Part 6 of the present study.

⁸⁶ *PR*, 42.

⁸⁷ R.G. Collingwood, 'Review of *The Decline of the West*' by Oswald Spengler, *Antiquity* I, 3 (September 1927) as quoted in *PR*, 42.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

Dawson added, 'To the English mind, ever suspicious of the theorist and perhaps of the historical theorist more than all others, [Spengler's] views may seem so fantastic as to be hardly worthy of consideration. But this is largely due to a difference of historical outlook.'⁸⁹ Clearly, Dawson was trying to bridge the gap between the reactionary Romantic tradition on the Continent and the rigid empiricist tradition in England, since he believed that both were able to contribute to a more sane and substantive historiography in tune with human experience.

Dawson believed that culture should be the basis for historical study because, as Russell Hittinger notes, a *genus humanum* 'does not exist as a concrete historical subject.' 'Given the contingent, particular, and plural character of the lives of men and cultures,' Hittinger continues, '[Dawson] argued that it is impossible to achieve a scientifically rigorous universal history of *man quā man* History "deals with civilizations and culture rather than civilization," which is another way of saying that history properly deals with men rather than "man."' This is what the social scientists of the following generation, most notably Friedrich LePlay, whom Dawson claimed had greatly influenced his own views, were finally able to free themselves from, in short, 'the vices of older methods,' which brought the social sciences into touch with 'the concrete basis of human life.'⁹⁰ LePlay's ideas, which are relatively unknown today, were introduced to Dawson through Patrick Geddes, the editor of *The Sociological Review*.⁹¹ LePlay's concept of culture as outlined in his massive series *Les Ouvriers Européens* proposed a correlation between biology and sociology which considers the society

⁸⁹PR, 38.

⁹⁰Christopher Dawson to John Mulloy, 4 July 1954 quoted in Charles B. Cushing, 'Christopher Dawson's Cultural Morphology' (St. John's University: PhD dissertation, unpublished, 1971), 10.

⁹¹Costello, 132.

and the relationship of European labourers to their geographical location and circumstances, all of which played an important role in the formation of their culture.⁹² 'The process of the development of a culture,' Dawson wrote 'has a considerable analogy to that of a biological species or subspecies. A new biological type arises in response to the requirements of the environment, normally perhaps as the result of the segregation of a community in a new or changing environment. So too, a culture, reduced to its simplest terms, is simply the way of life of a particular people adapted to a special environment; it is the result of an intimate communion between man and the region in which and from he lives.'⁹³ At this point it should be noted that Dawson was not strictly a materialist in his conception of culture. There are other factors, discussed in more detail in *The Age of the Gods*, which led to cultural development, the most notable being the interaction between cultures. Thus, in contrast to Spengler's understanding of history as cycles, Dawson argued that while history has a cyclical pattern, each cycle remains incomplete, with the characteristics of the culture in question becoming part of another cycle early in its development. So long as human interaction exists and the ideas and ways of life are exchanged through various mediums, the dynamic in history will continue to progress. Dawson cited W. H. R. Rivers' work, *Psychology and Politics*, to illustrate this point. Concerning his observations about the history of the Melanesian culture, Rivers wrote,

I was led to the view that the current conception of independent evolution which I had accepted so blindly was a fiction. The evidence ... from Melanesia suggests that an isolated people does not change or advance, but that the introduction of new ideas, new instruments and new techniques leads to a definite process of evolution, the product of which may differ greatly from either the indigenous or the immigrant constituents, the result of the interaction thus resembling a chemical

⁹²Friedrich LePlay, *Les Ouvriers Européens* 6 vols., 2nd edition (1877-1879).

⁹³PR, 51.

compound rather than a physical mixture. The study of the Melanesian culture suggests that when this newly-set-up process of evolution has reached a certain pith it comes to an end, and is followed by a period of stagnation which endures until some fresh incoming of external influences sets up a new period of progress.⁹⁴

If Dawson's idea of history and his attempt to bridge the methodological gap between the essentially relativistic historicist school and universalist Enlightenment views seems paradoxical, there is just cause to believe so. On the one hand, he embraces many of the anti-Enlightenment claims of the historicist school, most notably its rejection of natural laws based upon autonomous reason. On the other hand, by promoting the historical methodologies of Vico, Herder, and Ranke, Dawson attempted to sustain several Enlightenment assumptions such as the superiority of Western culture and the idea of progress, both of which he believed to be conditional rather than absolute. In the final analysis, Dawson neither embraced the relativism of Spengler nor could he support the same confidence of Western superiority as found in the secular character of Enlightenment epistemology and notions of progress.

History, Dawson believed, is essentially made up of both paradox and pattern with neither taking a dominant role in the historical process. Because for Dawson the dynamic throughout history has been religion, the ambiguities at the heart of spiritual belief and its expression in the material world make the ends of history a mystery. Dawson's understanding of the dynamic of history came closest to that of Hegel whose philosophy he believed to be 'fundamentally religious' when stripped of its nationalism.⁹⁵ Yet he ultimately rejected Hegel's conclusions not only because his nationalism informed his understanding of the past but because, like Marx and Engels, he concluded that history could predict the future.

⁹⁴W. H. R. Rivers, *Psychology and Politics* (1914), 118 quoted in *PR*, 54.

⁹⁵See Schwartz, 794.

Spengler was a prime example of the folly of historical relativism. Nevertheless, history, while ultimately a mystery, still affords hints of pattern and linearity. In historical studies this manifested itself in at least two ways: first, the Progressivists of the twentieth century continued to promote the idea that history does indeed move forward; second, there was a clear attempt on the part of historians to discover a more scientific way of researching and writing history. The common religious experiences and notions of transcendence between cultures throughout history do provide a strong case for the interconnectedness of the human experience and the existence of spiritual ends to history. 'The past does not die,' Dawson contended, but rather 'it becomes incorporated in humanity. And hence progress is possible, since the life of the society and of humanity itself possess continuity and the capacity for spiritual growth no less than the life of the individual.'⁹⁶

Although *The Age of the Gods* established Dawson as a scholar, *Progress and Religion* thrust him into the discussion after the First World War of modernity and the idea of progress. Intellectuals and artists praised the book for its analysis and insight into what were seen as fundamental problems with modern society. Both books ensured Dawson a devoted reading audience for many years to come.

⁹⁶Dawson, quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 100.

Part Three

Historian of Europe: 1930 to 1934

Success

The Age of the Gods, Progress and Religion, and articles published in *The Sociological Review* were an enormous success and laid a solid foundation for Dawson's academic and apologetic pursuits. His response to Oswald Spengler's pessimistic thesis about the future of Western Civilization, his analysis of the connections between religion and culture, and his keen insight into contemporary issues had made him somewhat of a celebrity among his Catholic contemporaries. Indeed, by 1930 he had the unique distinction of being the first Catholic historian in Britain to make 'full use of nineteenth- and twentieth-century methodological refinements' while at the same time remaining within the boundaries of Rome's anti-liberal and anti-modern expectations for scholarship.¹ From this perspective, Dawson was in a class of his own by the turn of the decade, offering a thoroughly Catholic perspective on history while remaining academically responsible in his scholarship. Demand soared for his commentary on history and current events and

¹ Allitt, 238. Lord Acton had argued throughout his life that one of the primary reasons for the slow development of Catholic historiography in Britain was because of Rome's hostility to modernity as expressed in 1864 in the *Syllabus of Errors* and the encyclical *Quanta Cura*. Dawson, nevertheless, was able to bridge the gap between the anti-modernism of the nineteenth-century encyclicals and the modern methods of historical research, thus fulfilling Acton's dream of a Catholic historiography on a par with continental scholarship, albeit after his death in 1902. For more see Allitt, *Catholic Converts*, 2; David Mathew, *Lord Acton and His Times* (University, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1968), 161-63 and Hugh MacDougall, 'The Later Acton' in *Bishops and Writers* (Wheathamstead: Anthony Clarke, 1977), 35-50. Roland Hill's *Lord Acton* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) is the most recent work about Acton.

between 1930 and 1934, he wrote on average one book each year. He also edited several books, published more than thirty-two articles, lectured at two universities, and frequently attended 'salons' throughout the London area.² Undoubtedly, the first half of the 1930s was a remarkably successful period of his career, and marks his ascent out of relative anonymity into a very public role in the literary culture of England.³ And in spite of his devotion to the Catholic tradition, his overall perspective was responsible for the second element in this continued success: his broad intellectual appeal.

Like Chesterton, Dawson was able to transcend denominational barriers while at the same time maintaining those distinctions that made him by conviction a Catholic. This ability attracted a loyal readership that included Catholics, Anglicans, and even some Nonconformists who accepted, at least in principle, some of his polemics. His moderate theological attitude towards non-Catholics was welcomed by Protestants as well as some Catholic readers, who had been for some time promoting the need for ecumenism as a strategy by which to create Christian unity in an obviously disunited modern world.⁴ While Dawson was slow to take part in ecumenical endeavours until his participation in 'The Work and Life Conference' held at Oxford in 1937, his vision of a wider Christendom beyond the

² A 'salon' is a regular gathering of intellectuals and artists. During the interwar years, many Catholic thinkers met in these salons to discuss current events and the appropriate Catholic response to them. They used a French word to describe their meetings in order to emulate the Catholic salons on the continent. Indeed many continental Catholic intellectuals such as Karl Mannheim and Jacques Maritain travelled to England to attend them, as we will see later in this chapter.

³ I must be careful here not to overstate the reach of his influence. It is clear that Dawson's admirers were almost all within the Christian sphere of influence. There is little or no record of a reading audience with little or no connection to Christianity, something which Dawson himself lamented near the end of the 1930s. See Scott, *Historian*, 128.

⁴ For example see Charles Boyer, *Christian Unity and the Ecumenical Movement* (London: Burns and Oates, 1962).



Catholic Church was still years ahead of the official position of the Church's hierarchy, who had been reluctant to embrace the idea of Christian cooperation.⁵

The third factor in his prominence as an author was a matter of timing. His criticisms of liberalism and modernity seemed to be justified by the economic collapse in 1929, an event that magnified the already heightened sense of angst after the Great War. Continued political upheaval in Eastern Europe and the rise of fascism in central Europe had created among historians a renewed interest in the former unity of Europe and the reasons for its present disintegration.⁶ For Dawson, the concern for European unity could not have come at a more suitable time, as a book about the history of Europe was to be included in his intended five-volume history of culture.

It was these three factors that led T. S. Eliot, one of Dawson's most well-known non-Catholic admirers, to look to this mild-mannered scholar for an analysis of the contemporary crises in the Western world. Eliot was an avid reader of *The Dublin Review* and a friend of its editor, Arthur Thorold.⁷ In 1929, after prompting from Thorold, Eliot initiated a correspondence with Dawson, hoping to have him publish something in his own journal, *Criterion*. Eliot had founded the journal in 1922 as a means to record and explore his own concern about the vices of modern culture.⁸ The earliest articles in the journal were primarily literary but,

⁵Reyes, 265.

⁶See Stuart Woolf, 'Europe and its Historians', *Contemporary European History*, vol. 12:3 (August 2003): 325.

⁷By 1929 Dawson had written four articles for *The Dublin Review*: 'Christianity and the Idea of Progress', *The Dublin Review*, no. 180 (1927): 19-39; 'Crisis of the West' *The Dublin Review*, no. 181 (1927): 261-77; 'Revolt of the East and the Catholic Tradition' *The Dublin Review*, no. 183 (1928): 1-14; 'The New Leviathan' *The Dublin Review*, no. 185 (1929): 88-102.

⁸The above information regarding *Criterion* is taken from Michael R. Stevens, 'T.S. Eliot's Neo-Medieval Economics', *The Journal of Markets and Morality*, vol.2, no. 2 (Autumn 1999).

in 1928, he became increasingly concerned with mounting a critique of modern economic practices and how they either benefited or detracted from the cultural life of Western society.⁹ It may have been Dawson's own criticism of modern industrialism and economic principles in his article 'The New Leviathan',¹⁰ written in 1929, that led to Eliot's request for a contribution to *Criterion*. In his letter to Dawson, Eliot wrote,

I have recently read some of your work and have had it in my mind some little time to write to you to express my interest. But I have only been brought to the point at this moment by having had some conversation about you yesterday with Mr. Algar Thorold and Father Burdett. I wish merely to express my conviction that *The Criterion* ought to publish some essay by you and I should be very grateful if you would write to me and make some suggestion.¹¹

Dawson was eager to comply and wrote an essay entitled 'The End of an Age.'¹² The article was published the following year and reiterated the themes from his book, *Progress and Religion*. Unlike *Progress and Religion*, however, the article was primarily a challenge to his contemporaries rather than an academic consideration of new developments in sociology and anthropology. The desperate conditions under which Europe entered the new decade demanded answers, and the tone of 'The End of an Age' reflected this need and was both openly apologetic and obviously hostile towards the 'hopes for a mechanized utopia' as well as

⁹Stevens, 'Neo-Medieval Economics', 2-3.

¹⁰'The New Leviathan' was republished in 1933 in his book *Enquiries into Religion and Culture*. The contents of the article, therefore, will be given more attention within the context of that book later in this chapter.

¹¹TS Eliot to Christopher Dawson, 16 August, 1929 quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 92.

¹²Christopher Dawson, 'The End of an Age', *Criterion*, vol. 9, no. 36 (1930): 386-401.

‘standardized democratic culture.’¹³ After briefly outlining the fall of Rome and the rise of Christendom, Dawson concluded,

The return to an organic type of society and the recovery of a spiritual principle in social life need not imply the coming of an age of obscurantism or of material squalor and decay. On the contrary it may well give a new lease of life to Western civilization and restore the creative power which the secularization of modern culture has destroyed.¹⁴

In fact the desire to return to an organic type of society as a means toward cultural renewal in the West was not new, nor was Dawson’s frustration with modern culture unique. The historian, Jackson Lears, observes that the ‘disenchantment’ with modern culture was a widespread phenomenon. Lears clearly could be describing Dawson’s perspective as written in ‘The End of the Age’ in noting,

[In the early twentieth century, a] feeling of over-civilization signified a sign of a broader transatlantic dissatisfaction with modern culture in all its dimensions: its ethic of self control and autonomous achievement On both sides of the Atlantic, one begins to sense a restive desire for a refreshing of the cultural atmosphere. They [the anti-modernists] recognized that the triumph of modern culture ... had promoted a spreading sense of moral impotence and spiritual sterility.¹⁵

Although Lear’s book was written from a broader sociological perspective, it does reveal that while many of Dawson’s contemporaries would not have accepted his diagnosis of cultural decline, they would have at least recognized a great need for a cultural renewal of some form. Modern culture had failed to

¹³This does not suggest that Dawson’s writings were less apologetic in the 1920s than during the 1930s. As I have mentioned earlier, there is a clear apologetic essence to all of his publications throughout his career. It is clear, however, that by the 1930s he had a more solid literary base from which to write more deliberate challenges to his contemporaries. He was, then, by 1930, able to apply contemporary social criticism through his earlier research in the Social Sciences and History. Dawson, ‘End of An Age’, 395.

¹⁴Dawson, ‘End of an Age’, 401.

¹⁵Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 4-5.

produce the greater autonomy that was promised by its earliest prophets.¹⁶ Many within the religious circles nevertheless associated society's 'spiritual sterility' with the economic principles of Capitalism and the increased wealth and secular autonomy that accompanied it. With Max Weber, they believed that the Protestant expression of Christianity was partly responsible for a detachment between the life of the society and spiritual reality.¹⁷ The answer to many was a return to the pre-modern religious tradition of Catholicism.

A steady stream of conversions to Catholicism began as early as the mid-nineteenth century after the conversion of Newman and other members of the Oxford Movement. Thanks to the scholarship of Arnold Sparr and more recently Patrick Allitt, this sixty-year period of transition to the Catholic Church may now be seen as a larger intellectual movement rather than merely a series of individual conversions.¹⁸ Like Dawson, these and other converts found in Catholicism an authority that was absent in the liberal ideals of individualism and secular humanism. For this reason, many conversions that were the result of this reasoning were primarily of an intellectual nature. It was only a matter of time, then, before a significant number of Catholics would develop into a loud and unified voice attempting to both criticize and renew English cultural life.

Cardinal Newman's conversion to Catholicism accelerated the already steady stream of decisions by Anglicans to 'go over to Rome.' The conversions continued into the twentieth century with the illustrious convert G. K. Chesterton

¹⁶Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 1-5.

¹⁷See, for example, G.K Chesterton, 'Democracy and Industrialism' taken from *All I Survey* in the *Illustrated London News*, 16 July 1932. For Dawson's opinion regarding capitalism and modern culture see Christopher Dawson, 'The Problem of Wealth' *The Spectator*, no. 147 (1931): 485.

¹⁸See Allitt, *Catholic Converts*, ix-xii and Sparr, *To Promote, Defend, and Redeem*, xi-30.

leading the way through his brilliant and satirical literary skills and criticism of all things modern. The conversions came at a time when England was rapidly 'losing its historic identity as a Protestant nation,' while at the same time Catholics were enjoying a period of 'steady expansion' in the social life of the country.¹⁹ Catholic intellectuals were unified in their hope for a 'revivification of Christian culture.'²⁰ An 'intellectual elite,' united around a common 'theology of culture,' they attempted to add a spiritual leaven to a tired and spent British society with their new-found faith, at the heart of which lay a 'culture-transforming synthesis made up of divine revelation and human wisdom.'²¹ The literary skill of Chesterton as well as the oratorical eloquence of the politician and 'cradle Catholic' Hilaire Belloc combined with the development of a distinctive and unified Catholic voice to conceive what was to be self-confidently referred to as the 'Catholic Revival'.²² Dawson would play a vital role in continuing this brilliant intellectual, literary, and artistic tradition into the 1930s.

¹⁹Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 161; Sheridan Gilley, 'Years of Equipoise, 1892-1943' in V. Alan McClelland and Micahel Hodgetts (eds.) *From Without the Flaminian Gate* (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1999), 21.

²⁰Aidan Nichols, 'Christopher Dawson's Catholic Setting', in John Morrill and Stratford Caldecott (eds.) *Eternity in Time* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1997), 28.

²¹Nichols, 'Catholic Setting', 26.

²²Adrian Hastings, 'Some Reflexions on the English Catholicism of the late 1930s', in Garrett Sweeney (ed.) *Bishops and Writers* (Cambridge: St. Edmunds House, 1977), 107-125.

‘The Catholic (Intellectual) Revival’

For all its perceived significance, the Catholic Revival remains an ambiguous and misunderstood phenomenon in the history of English Catholicism.²³ While much new scholarship has been written about it in recent years, Adrian Hastings’ observation that it is ‘an age in the modern history of English Catholicism [that has] fallen into ... oblivion’ remains true in proportion to the ideas and personalities it created.²⁴ Indeed, much of the most recent scholarship has been devoted to the literary components of the revival.²⁵ The revival was self-confidently named by those directly involved in it and was viewed as a natural outcome of earlier advances by Catholics in the social and political life of England.²⁶ Yet, as much as they saw their ‘revival’ as the pinnacle and natural

²³ While elements and personalities associated with the Catholic Revival of this era have been covered in numerous articles and books, most notably Patrick Allitt’s *Catholic Converts* and Aidan Nichols’ study *Dominican Gallery*. I believe there has yet to be completed a comprehensive study on the revival as a distinctive intellectual movement among English Catholics.

²⁴ Hastings, ‘Reflexions’, 107.

²⁵ For two examples see Joseph Pearce, *Literary Converts: Spiritual Inspiration in an Age of Unbelief* (Ignatius Press, 2000) and Ian Ker, *The Catholic Revival in English Literature, 1845-1961* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).

²⁶ For example, in his *A History of Christianity*, Adrian Hastings noted the following: ‘Catholics were now coming to occupy a somewhat privileged position in the life of the country. It was recognized that they were different and that their differences should be almost over-respected ... Old Protestant prejudices and new liberal fears about the Catholic Church were offset by what one [unnamed] Anglican historian has described irritably as the ‘tacit convention that the Roman Catholic minority in this country, which plays so little part in public life even in proportion to its

fulfilment of the numerical growth and equipoise of Catholicism in English society, few connections can be made between the growth of English Catholicism at a popular level and the sophistication of its intellectuals. The revival, as those involved understood it, remained an elitist event, cut off from the greater number of the nearly two million Catholics in England. Thus it was not so much a 'revival' as it was the coming together of a relatively small yet notable collection of artists and intellectuals who wrote about and discussed theological and philosophical questions and their perceived significance to contemporary issues during the years following the First World War.

Whatever problems exist with defining the nature of the revival itself, the confidence of those involved cannot be overstated. Maisie Ward, a Catholic author and daughter of one of Dawson's publishers, Wilfrid Ward, revelled in this reversal in public attitude toward Catholics as she confidently declared,

the long siege [against Catholicism] is over. For the siege implied coherent and successful human systems and a Church hemmed in and on the defensive. Today there are no such systems. Over against the Church stands chaos. The one great question that remains is which shall prevail – chaos or the divine order eternally established by God.²⁷

Likewise, Peter Wust believed that the revival marked the 'return of Catholicism from exile.'²⁸ The revival gained strength in its unity during the chaotic decade after the First World War. Its unity was seen as evidence of a new-found sophistication proving that Catholics could indeed provide worthwhile and informed discussion of contemporary issues. Catholic journals such as *The Dublin*

numbers, should be treated with an obsequious deference, such as is not awarded to any other dissenting body or even to the National Church.' 'Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1985* (London: Collins, 1986), 134.

²⁷ Maisie Ward, *Insurrection versus Resurrection: The Wilfrid Wards and the Transition II* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1937), 550.

²⁸ Peter Wust quoted in Dawson, 'General Introduction to the Essays in Order Series' (New York: Macmillan Company, 1931), xvi.

Review bore witness to some measure of intellectual advancement. *The Tablet*, while a controversial journal as a result of its many right-wing contributors, was widely read and continued to grow in prestige into the Second World War. Journals were the megaphones for Catholic public debate and built on the apologetic foundation laid by prominent intellectuals such as Chesterton and Belloc. If these two giants of English Catholicism had made the Catholic voice impossible to ignore, the Catholics who followed made the voice even more appealing to those willing to listen, as they had a broader intellectual appeal.²⁹

Although Dawson had written articles for *The Dublin Review*, his introduction to many of the key members associated with the revival was through a salon, known among his peers as the 'Chelsea Group'.³⁰ The 'Chelsea Group' or 'Chelsea Set,' as it was often called, has been described by one historian as 'the most important Catholic salon of the period,' not solely because of the names associated with it, but also because of the connections with French intellectuals who were at the heart of the revival on the continent.³¹ Taking into consideration Dawson's shy nature and reclusive tendencies as a scholar, his introduction to this confident and often flamboyant group of artists, doctors, and intellectuals was perhaps the most significant development in his career, as it forced him out of his library and into the public sphere of cutting-edge debate and commentary on topics of which he was keenly, yet for the most part privately, aware.

²⁹James Periero, 'Who are the Laity?' in V. Alan McClelland and Michael Hodgetts (eds.), *From Without the Flaminian Gate* (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1999), 175.

³⁰Information about the 'Chelsea Group', or 'Chelsea Set' as it is sometimes known is taken from Scott, *A Historian*, 94-97; Hastings, 'Reflexions', 107-125; Nichols, 'Catholic Setting', 30-32.

³¹Nichols, 'Christopher Dawson's Catholic Setting', 30. The name 'salon' given to the meeting reveals the sense of connection with the same kind of meetings taking place on the continent. It was indeed seen as sophisticated to meet in groups and discuss current events.

The salon met at the house of the doctor and psychologist Charles Burns, at St. Leonard's Terrace in Chelsea. It included the Welsh artist and author, David Jones, who had been received into the Catholic Church in 1921; the Jesuit and author, Martin D'Arcy; Alec Dru, who later became the translator and editor of the journal *Kierkegaard*; Harman Grisewood of the BBC; and Bernard Wall, a political journalist who wrote works on Dante and Petrarch.³² One of the primary goals of the Chelsea Group was to attempt to go beyond the insularity of English Catholics by introducing them to the scholarship of Catholics on the continent. Through the efforts of Tom Burns and Dawson, the theological works of the neo-Thomist French theologian and philosopher, Jacques Maritain, were published in English and the theology of Karl Adam and Romano Guardini were introduced into English Catholicism.³³

The medium for this introduction was a journal entitled *Order*. In spite of Cardinal Newman's aspirations during the second half of the nineteenth century for an educated laity involved in the 'public life of the country', the majority of English Catholics by the early twentieth century had not moved towards that end.³⁴ It was hoped that *Order* would create a much needed stimulus to this idea. The parallels between Dawson's own vision and that of the revival had not gone unnoticed by the journal's pioneers. Within months of his introduction to the salon, he was asked to take on more responsibility in this task through a leading role as its editor. On a personal level, it was a medium for Dawson to continue introducing

³² Christina Scott devoted several pages to this group in her biography on Dawson. For the purpose of clarification, she recorded that the Salon met at the house of Thomas Burns. However, Thomas (Tom) Burns was the younger brother of Charles Burns. The Salon did in fact meet at Charles Burns' house. Tom Burns, nonetheless, was involved in the discussion that took place and played a key role in the group's formation and influence.

³³ Periero, 'Who are the Laity?', 176.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 167-172.

English academics to the ideas that had been central to *The Age of the Gods* and *Progress and Religion*.

Essays in Order, as the articles were later published, was not merely a collection of articles written to 'make the contemporary movement of Catholic thought on the Continent better known in [England]'.³⁵ A further motive, as Dawson himself articulated it, was to 'attempt to face the problems which arise from [the new social order in Europe,] and to examine the possibilities of cooperation and of conflict that exist between the Catholic order and the new world.'³⁶ The description 'new world' was commonly used by the contributors to emphasize the changed environment after what was seen by many people as the collapse of the capitalist order. Since economic and political reforms had failed to restore order throughout Europe by 1931, the contributors to the journal, including Dawson, believed that the problems of Europe were, at its base, the result of a rejection of natural laws and spiritual authority. This meant that any solutions to these problems required the reconsideration of pre-modern assumptions about the relationship between the temporal and transcendent orders.

The rhetoric behind such an observation may appear at best abstract and intellectually light-weight. Yet the dozens of articles written for the journal over the two-year period were products of an informed examination of contemporary events. Their 'theology of culture' drew heavily on philosophical and theological resources that were basic to the development of almost every area of Western civilization. Consequently, those involved with *Order* believed they were the standard bearers of neglected cultural, political, and religious elements in the

³⁵ Christopher Dawson, General Introduction to Jacques Maritain, *Essays in Order* no. 1. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1931), xix.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, v.

Western world and that they could restore the progressive impulse that they understood to be central to its historical roots and culture. David Jones' engraving of a unicorn that graced the cover of the series revealed the prophetic ambition of those involved with *Order*. Like the unicorn who, according to legend, dips her horn in the bitter water of the forest to make it drinkable for the animals, so they aimed not only to identify and clarify for their readers the circumstances leading to the decline and collapse of the Western world but also to provide a remedy for them. 'The contributors to *Essays in Order*,' Aidan Nichols eloquently explains, 'would clarify – in the sense of purify – the waters of culture which, though life-giving of themselves, have become muddied and unsanitary. The grace of the saviour (typologically, the Unicorn) will achieve what is otherwise impossible by rendering culture salutary once more. To change the metaphor, Christianity can heal what is wounded in contemporary culture and raise it up so that it becomes a manifestation of the life of the children of God.'³⁷

Order was perhaps the most ambitious attempt by English Catholics to challenge, and in their mind eclipse, the arguments in the scholarship of their secular counterparts about contemporary events and the political and economic chaos that characterized it.³⁸ 'The [Order] series represented a remarkable intellectual event', writes Arnold Sparr, and included many notable contributors.³⁹ Each contributor emphasized with Dawson that it was 'the midnight hour' of Western civilization and that as Catholics and intellectuals, they had a special role to play in this, a transitory period of history.⁴⁰ The object of the journal was similar

³⁷Nichols, 'Catholic Setting', 35.

³⁸See Allitt, 15-16.

³⁹Sparr, 106.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 106-107.

to that of the revival in general: to 'foster a love of the liturgy and to recognise the value of all ... creative work irrespective of religion.'⁴¹ There was, then, a distinctively ecumenical slant to their ambitious work towards the renewal of contemporary culture, in spite of the obvious celebration of Catholicism as representative of authentic Christian culture.

The ecumenical approach of *Order* did not reflect the Catholicism of the earlier generation of English Catholics. In recollection, Scott noted that '[the journal] was directed against the old-time militant Catholic who was fiercely anti-Anglican and enthusiastic for the material, temporal and visible triumphs of the Church, aggressive and rigid in argument showing no sympathetic knowledge of human character.'⁴² Although the generation following Chesterton and Belloc were, for the most part, of the same mind as their predecessors and indebted to them intellectually, this new generation of Catholic intellectuals believed it was better strategy to approach their apologetic mission as Catholics through an intellectual method that engaged the world around them, rather than continually sparring against it as was more often than not the approach of the anti-Protestant slanders of Belloc. That this sentiment was prevalent among them is suggested in what was labelled a 'confidential document' from the Salon's meeting. In it, an unknown participant wrote: 'while the Chester-Bellocians *exeunt* fighting, the cultured Catholics and non-Catholics are at sea on most things connected with sex, other-world religions, the problem of evil, free will and behaviouristic psychology.'⁴³ Citing this, Scott noted that the intellectual pursuits of the group

⁴¹ Scott, *Historian*, 96.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 96.

⁴³ Author unknown, 'Private and Confidential', 19 October 1928, STUA, Miscellaneous Correspondence Box 1, folder 'to be filed' quoted in Scott, *A Historian*, 96.

were, at least in part, in conscious reaction to the apologetic methods of the likes of Chesterton and Belloc in the previous decade.⁴⁴ While this fact may have been inferred from the less militant themes to be found in many essays, the fact that the apologetic methods used by the 'Chester-Belloc' school had embarrassed many of the participants was not revealed until after the journal's demise.

In response to Scott's observation, Jonathon Reyes is correct in his suggestion that the views expressed in the document may not necessarily be those of Dawson. Reyes observed that the document in question was written in the first person and was merely addressed to 'everyone who has written for *Order*.'⁴⁵ Lastly, the document does not dismiss the 'Chester-Bellocians' and even proposes a certain level of co-operation with them.⁴⁶ Although Reyes has added some clarity to Scott's analysis, it is difficult to ignore the fundamental differences between the apologetic methods of the writers in *Order* and the approach taken by earlier Catholics, especially Belloc. The writers of *Order*, including Dawson, were attempting to create a new environment for Catholic apologetics which would foster spiritual renewal in the Western world through the encouragement of 'a renaissance of Catholic action, both in intellectual and social life.'⁴⁷ Thus, the distinguishing point between the Chesterton-Belloc school and the Chelsea Group was that the former was almost entirely counter-cultural in its orientation while the approach of the latter was in many ways the opposite. Indeed, the Chelsea Group hoped to bridge the differences between Catholic scholarship and secular academia, yet at the same time maintain their Catholic identity and counter-cultural

⁴⁴See Scott, *Historian*, 96-7.

⁴⁵'Private and Confidential', 1.

⁴⁶Reyes, 'Renewal of Christian Culture', 141-142.

⁴⁷Dawson, Introduction to Maritain, *Essays in Order*, xxiii.

ideals against the secular aspects of modernity. Although this may appear to be contradictory it is not. Both parties were essentially counter-cultural in their approaches to the problems of their era, but Dawson and his fellow intellectuals in the Salon believed that a level of commonality had to be found. In a sense, such commonality was an imperative to any apologetic task in order to influence the system in question. Dawson's anti-modern stance against liberalism, for example, did not annul his scholarly approach to history and philosophy, and although he may have agreed with Belloc's emphasis on the unity of the medieval period, he almost certainly disagreed with Belloc's one-sided historical methodology and general philosophical approach. It is clear from a letter to Maisie Ward that he believed that Belloc's 'anti-philosophical bias' was potentially harmful to the future generation of Catholic authors.⁴⁸ On the one hand Reyes was correct in noting 'that Dawson would be opposed to a perceived dismissal of modern philosophy in Belloc is an understandable criticism, but it still does not amount to a total disavowal of the man.'⁴⁹ On the other, it is impossible to ignore the differences in their approaches to their tasks as historians and apologists.

Clearly, the ecumenical approach of those involved in the Catholic revival posed no problem for Dawson who, while holding to the uniqueness of Christian culture and the superiority of Catholic culture, had several years earlier positively highlighted the universal spiritual dynamic found in other cultures besides that of

⁴⁸Christopher Dawson to Maisie Ward, (not dated), UNDA, 5/004 quoted in Reyes, 'Renewal of Christian Culture', 143.

⁴⁹Reyes, 'Renewal of Christian Culture', 143-144. See also Russell Hittinger, 'The Metahistorical Vision of Christopher Dawson' in Peter Cataldo (ed.), *The Dynamic Character of Christian Culture* (New York: University Press of America), 221.

the Christian.⁵⁰ His contemporaries, like himself, believed modern Western culture could only be salvaged through an infusion of those elements found in the spiritual order as defined most clearly in the papal encyclicals of the late nineteenth century.⁵¹ Moreover, the political undertone of *Order* naturally directed Dawson into commentary about politics, an arena which he had tended to avoid up to this point in his life.⁵² Even though in his earlier writings he had made reference to contemporary political issues, he had not yet provided a political commentary upon them in the strictest of senses. By 1932 Dawson had already provided some analysis of the current political developments throughout Europe in several articles such as 'European Democracy and the New Economic Forces,' the introduction to Carl Schmitt's *The Necessity of Politics*, and *The Modern Dilemma: The Problem of European Unity*. The further development of these themes in later articles would come to play a larger role in his career in the 1930s.⁵³ It was, however, in the area of the history of Europe that he made his greatest contribution to the intellectual revival.

⁵⁰For an example, see Christopher Dawson, 'Islamic Mysticism' *The Dublin Review*, no. 186, (1930): 34-61 republished in Christopher Dawson, *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1933)

⁵¹Dawson, 'End of an Age', 400.

⁵²In spite of his parents' hopes for a political career for their son, Dawson's consideration to go into politics lasted for only a few months in 1911 and 1912. See Scott, *Historian*, 57.

⁵³Christopher Dawson, 'European Democracy and the New Economic Forces', *The Sociological Review*, no. 22 (1930): 32-42; Christopher Dawson, Introduction to Carl Schmitt, *The Necessity of Politics* in *Essays in Order* no. 5 (New York: MacMillan, 1931), 8-28; Christopher Dawson, *The Modern Dilemma: The Problem of European Unity* in *Essays in Order* no. 5 (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1932). His other significant political commentary in the latter half of the decade will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter.

The Making of Europe (1932)

Perhaps the greatest embarrassment to many English Catholic intellectuals of the Catholic revival was the unsophisticated historiography of the previous generation. History, and especially the history of the medieval period, became a poor weapon in the hands of amateur historians and apologists who attempted to wield it against the evils of modern industrialism and secular culture. Before 1930, Catholic historiography in England was dominated by the works of Belloc who frequently sacrificed academic responsibility and historical accuracy to polemics against Protestantism, much to the embarrassment of other English Catholic scholars.⁵⁴ While many other Catholics such as the poet Alfred Noyes attempted to write history responsibly, historiography was secondary to their careers as writers. Solid historical scholarship was desperately needed to cure this defect in Catholic intellectual life

Dawson's scholarship met this need and became central to the revival as it unfolded in Britain by providing historical scholarship that was both empirical in method and apologetic in aim. Although throughout the 1920s he wrote almost exclusively for *The Sociological Review*, in which he provided insights into sociological issues associated with culture and civilization, topics relating

⁵⁴ See A.N. Wilson, *Hilaire Belloc* (1984; London: Penguin Books, 1986), 297-317.

specifically to the history of Europe were central to several articles in *The Dublin Review* as well as *The English Review*.⁵⁵ Yet the time had come for a more comprehensive analysis of European history.

In 1931 Dawson's publisher approached him with the idea of writing a book that would analyse the development of Europe as a unity. For Dawson, such a project was not a completely novel idea. His ambition to write a comprehensive history of Europe can be traced to his schooling at Oxford in 1909; during this time he was introduced to Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, as well as the works of other historians of Europe whom he felt had not understood fully the debt which modern Europe owed to the intellectual and spiritual development during the medieval era.⁵⁶ For this reason, an analysis of the medieval period and its centrality to European unity was to be the apex of his history of culture.⁵⁷ This analysis was to be part of the third volume of the set, but by 1931 he had only published the introductory work and the first volume.⁵⁸ The concern his peers expressed about the economic and social upheaval throughout Europe may explain his failure to publish a comprehensive work on the rise of the world religions, the intended second volume of his series, in favour of what is possibly his best and most important book, *The Making of Europe*.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Christopher Dawson, 'Crisis of the West', *The Dublin Review*, no. 181 (1927): 261-277; 'Revolt of the East and the Catholic Tradition', *The Dublin Review*, no. 183 (1928): 1-14; 'St. Augustine and His Age' in Martin C. D'Arcy et. al (eds.) *A Monument to Saint Augustine* (New York: Dial Press, 1930); 'New Decline and Fall', *The English Review*, no. 52 (1931): 413-21.

⁵⁶ Dawson did publish historiography about history in earlier works such as *Progress and Religion* but by 1932 had not yet published a book devoted solely to the topic.

⁵⁷ This book about the medieval period was to be volume three. See Scott, *Historian*, 83.

⁵⁸ Christopher Dawson, *Progress and Religion* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1929) and Christopher Dawson, *The Age of the Gods* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1928)

⁵⁹ Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1932), hereafter *ME*. This book is not to be confused with his book *Understanding Europe* written twenty years later in 1952, which discussed at greater length the themes found in *The Making of Europe*. Christopher

In its breadth of knowledge and the gravity of its thesis, *The Making of Europe* was indeed a breakthrough work following a decade of his relative obscurity as a writer during the 1920s. It displayed a matured rendering of his philosophy of history as outlined earlier in the previous decade, combining the scholarship of *The Age of the Gods* with the more philosophical insights of *Progress and Religion*.⁶⁰ Scholarship aside, the immediate success of the book owed much to the environment into which it was released.

It has been noted already that with the end of the First World War came a renewed interest in histories of Europe.⁶¹ It was not, however, an interest in certain periods or aspects of European history but a specific concern with the idea of 'Europe' itself. In other words, what exactly was Europe and what had changed the assumption of its unity? Although the catalysts for such scholarly ambitions can be traced back to 1918 with Henri Pirenne's *Histoire de l'Europe* and Spengler's *Decline of the West*, it was not until the economic and political crises of the early 1930s that the majority of the books were published.⁶² It was at this time that the full consequences of the economic and political upheaval of the First World War were realized throughout the Western world. Although Spengler's observations had been dismissed by many scholars of his era as a-historical and therefore of

Dawson, *Understanding Europe* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1952). Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe* (1932; Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003; reprint)

⁶⁰ Regarding the former, Dawson continued to use cyclical principles for historical analysis throughout *The Making of Europe*, but the actual cyclical pattern in history was given a new subtlety by the book's sheer depth of historical analysis. In the articles written throughout the 1920s in response to Spengler's thesis of cycles in history, Dawson's analysis was much too abstract and oversimplified. In later works he was able to remain consistent with his cyclical understanding of historical movement, while remaining empirical in his analysis.

⁶¹ See Woolfe, 'Europe and its Historians', 323-337.

⁶² Henri Pirenne, *Histoire de l'Europe* (Paris Alcan, 1936); Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, 2 vols. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1918-1922).

little worth as an analysis of the contemporary crisis, the failure of the League of Nations to mend economic and political divisions as well as what was seen as the collapse of the capitalist order in 1929 suggested, at least in principle, the validity of Spengler's pessimism. Dawson had already responded to the *Decline of the West* in 1922, but was eager to publicise his own perspective towards the decline of the West.⁶³

Generally speaking, the Great War had given rise to a certain level of unanimity among scholars about the causes that had led to the disintegration of European unity. Following in the same line of thought as Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, in his mammoth work, *A Study of History*, emphasized the disintegrating effects of the social schisms that divided Europe through the economic and psychical individualism that seemed to be intrinsic to the modern nation state.⁶⁴ Similarly, Werner Kaegi placed the blame of European disunity on the Imperial ambitions of Europe's largest and wealthiest states.⁶⁵ In the final analysis of many historians like Toynbee and Kaegi, much of the blame for the breakdown of European unity could be placed on a social fragmentation caused by competing nation states, the roots of which could be traced back to the greed at the heart of the capitalist order.⁶⁶ Indeed, as Fernando Cervantes has noted recently, the 'bulk of the analyses [of Europe]... centred on the economic, political and strategic

⁶³ From this perspective Dawson was unique in comparison to the other authors who wrote in response to the War as his ambition to write a history of Europe pre-dates the First World War while he was at Oxford.

⁶⁴ See Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 285-294.

⁶⁵ Werner Kaegi, *Historische Meditationen* (Zurich: Fretz & Wasmuth, 1942), 249-314. See Woolf, 'Europe and Its Historians', 323-337.

⁶⁶ See Woolf, 'Europe and Its Historians', 323-26.

elements of the problem [European disunity].'⁶⁷ For Dawson, however, these elements were merely symptoms of greater issues leading to disunity rather than the causes themselves, and he articulated this by insisting that the problem of European disunity was far more profound than the consequences of feuding nation states. While he agreed with Toynbee and Kaegi's analysis to a certain degree, Dawson believed that the central problem was the result of a fissure between those elements that had created Europe in the first place and modern social and political ideals.

In spite of the obvious sociological and anthropological content of their books, Dawson believed that Spengler, Toynbee, and Kaegi had not avoided basing their interpretations along the same lines as those of the majority of nineteenth-century historians, who were too dependent on the national perspective as the most important element of an understanding of Europe. In so doing, like the generation before them, they reduced its history to the struggle for national and economic autonomy.⁶⁸ To give undue emphasis to the economic and political issues associated with national interests was to fail to acknowledge the need for a more profound understanding of what Dawson called the 'historic reality of Europe.'⁶⁹ From a practical perspective, the failure to recognize this reality was counter-productive to the process of creating order once again. It should not be surprising, then, that in the first few pages of *The Making of Europe*, Dawson attacked nineteenth-century historians who affirmed the qualities they believed to be inherent in European civilization yet at the same time undermined its unity

⁶⁷Cervantes, 'Dawson and Europe', 53.

⁶⁸Dawson, *ME*, 16-18.

⁶⁹Cervantes, 'Dawson and Europe', 53.

through the idealization of their own national perspectives. Indeed, nationalism was a factor in the destruction of the European ethos as a whole.

Along these same lines, Dawson centred his analysis of European civilization in his opinion that the cultural and moral progress of a unified Europe could still be a vital component of a re-ordered Europe. His contemporaries, in spite of the post-War ideological crisis surrounding such nineteenth-century assumptions, did the same. Stuart Woolf has recently observed that historians of Europe continued to accentuate the 'values of civilization and progress that are intrinsic to the history of Europe.'⁷⁰ The progressive and civilizing characteristics believed to be central to the Western ethos remained important to any future paradigm for re-establishing European unity. Dawson's analysis of Europe, however, while esteeming those same values, emphasized that unity could only be achieved through religious means.

In contrast to his contemporaries' abstract assumptions that the Western world could continue to progress and therefore remain on the moral high ground in the new era, Dawson attempted to study the nature of the West's progress in the past in order to provide a template for continued progress into the future. Although a controversial premise in the 1930s, he believed that only a study of the medieval past could reveal those characteristics that were foundational to the European identity. Clearly, *The Making of Europe* was Dawson's attempt to correct what Carl Schorske described as twentieth-century Europe's proud assertion of its 'independence from the past.'⁷¹

⁷⁰Woolf, 326.

⁷¹Carl E. Schorske, *Fin de siècle Vienne: Politics and Culture* (Cambridge: 1981 edn), xvii.

Dawson recognized that the etymology surrounding 'Europe' or 'European,' like many other words such as 'Christian' or 'Gentleman', had been trivialised as a description due to semantic shifts. Any study of Europe, then, had to begin at the most fundamental of levels, and needed to consider not only what Europe was, but also what it was not. The idea of Europe was not the natural result of geography, much less the product of racial uniformity. The region today known as 'Europe' has never been a self-contained geographical area. Racially, Europe is represented variously throughout diverse regions, from the hot, dry Iberian Peninsula to the cold, dense woodlands of Scandinavia. 'Europe is not a natural unity, like Australia or Africa,' Dawson explained; 'it is simply the north western prolongation of Asia and possesses less physical unity than India or China or Siberia; anthropologically it is a medley of races, and the European type of man represents a social rather than a racial unity.'⁷² If Europe could not owe its unity to geographical or racial factors, it was surely not the product of a 'concrete intellectual concept.'⁷³ In other words, the European identity is an ideal that cannot be explained or even minutely quantified apart from an analysis of those conditions that both directly and indirectly constitute its composition. From this perspective Dawson would have agreed with Michael Muller and Stuart Woolf, both of whom have argued that for much of its history, geographically Europe has been 'the sum of its component parts.'⁷⁴ Dawson would have disagreed with Woolfe that this fact reduces the idea of Europe to a concept dependent on the historian's perspective which, in turn, depends upon which region of Europe the individual is from. If teleology is the cardinal sin of the historian, undue relativism runs a very close

⁷² *ME*, 25.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷⁴ Woolf, 328.

second.⁷⁵ Dawson believed neither of these was necessarily inevitable in spite of the obvious ambiguity surrounding a definition and ideal of what it is to be 'European.'

Dawson concluded that the notion behind this ideal was a natural result of the 'creative process' in the social life of the people in the centuries following the political decline of the Roman Empire.⁷⁶ While the Roman Empire provided a certain amount of political and cultural possibilities for a European ideal, the underlying concept that became 'Europe' was first and foremost the result of the convergence of several cultural traditions which merged into a new and unique cultural expression in spite of the range of subcultures which existed in the various regions. Although the fullest aspects of the European expression were clearest during the Renaissance, the actual conception of it predated the Renaissance by over three hundred years. 'It is well to remember', Dawson concluded,

that the unity of our civilisation does not rest entirely on the secular culture and the material progress of the last four centuries. There are deeper traditions in Europe than these, and we must go back behind Humanism and behind the superficial triumphs of modern civilisation, if we wish to discover the fundamental social and spiritual forces that have gone to the making of Europe.⁷⁷

It was factors such as these, often overlooked, that Dawson attempted to portray throughout *The Making of Europe*. 'In reality,' he argued, '[the early medieval period] witnessed changes as momentous as any in the history of European civilisation; indeed, as I [have] suggested ... it was the most creative age

⁷⁵ Woolf's analysis of European historiography begins with the mid to late medieval period's 'defence of Christian Europe against the Muslim Ottoman expansion'. In so doing he neglects altogether the development of the actual idea of Europe in the years leading up to this period – something Dawson believed was imperative to a proper understanding of the idea of Europe. See Woolf, 323.

⁷⁶ *ME*, 19.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 244.

of all, since it created not this or that manifestation of culture, but the very culture itself – the root and ground of all the subsequent cultural achievements.’⁷⁸ Dawson identified four elements that he believed contributed to the formation of Europe.⁷⁹ The first three – the Roman Empire, the Catholic Church, and the Classical tradition – are generally accepted by past and present-day historians as fundamental to European identity.⁸⁰ It was in Dawson’s insistence of a fourth element – the contribution of Barbarian culture – that he parted with the majority of historians of his era, and it is this element that for the most part, is still misunderstood today. Before the last can be explained, however, his analysis of the first three must first be understood.

The first element, the political ideals of the Roman Empire, gave Europe a sense of common laws and common citizenship in spite of racial and cultural differences.⁸¹ At first glance, the strength of the Empire seemed to owe its unity to its great military strength and ‘genius for organisation.’⁸² While most historians would admit that these did indeed play a vital role in the political success of the Romans, this strength and military organization was, as a unifying force, ‘external

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁹ The following section owes much of its structure to the four elements Cervantes describes in his article on Dawson and Europe. See Cervantes, ‘Dawson and Europe’, 55-60.

⁸⁰ For a few examples see A. Daniel Frankforter, *The Medieval Millenium: An Introduction*, 2nd edition (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003), 1-135; Edward Peters, *Europe and the Middle Ages* 4th edition (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2004), 11-198; Clifford R. Backman, *The Worlds of Medieval Europe*, 11-84. Although these and other historians may not agree with Dawson’s overall analysis of the integration of the cultural components in the formation of Europe and what role they played in the Carolingian era, for example, they do acknowledge that early Medieval Europe was the product of their interaction.

⁸¹ Before writing *The Making of Europe*, Dawson had written quite extensively on the fall of the Roman Empire. See, for example, Christopher Dawson, ‘Rome: a Historical Survey’ *The Sociological Review*, no. 15, (1923): 132-47; Christopher Dawson, ‘St. Augustine and His Age’ in Martin C. D’Arcy et. al (eds.) *A Monument to Saint Augustine* (New York: Dial Press, 1930); Christopher Dawson, ‘New Decline and Fall’, *The English Review*, no. 52 (1931): 413-21.

⁸² *ME*, 27.

and superficial.’⁸³ Instead, Rome was indebted to the ‘social and intellectual life’ of its Hellenised culture inherited from the Greeks, so much so that Greece ‘conquered its conquerors.’⁸⁴ Centuries before Rome had become an Empire, the cultural ideals of Hellenism had developed in the Mediterranean world, creating for the first time a fundamental ‘difference between European and Asiatic ideals.’⁸⁵ The Greeks were responsible for the idea of a ‘higher civilisation,’ and the Romans were responsible for creating a political infrastructure allowing for the spread of these ideals into what today is Western Europe. For hundreds of years Rome increased in strength, spreading throughout Europe, introducing a ‘Latinised’ Hellenistic culture along with its infrastructure by its construction of cities. These cities were the centre of religious and political life and contributed to the rapid economic prosperity among its citizens. In so doing, they connected a vast geographical area, including the Empire, to the Barbarian tribes of Northern Europe. Throughout this period of vast expansion across what today is Europe, ‘the empire was bound together socially by common laws and a common culture, and materially by the vast system of roads, which rendered communications easier and safer than at any time before the seventeenth century.’ Consequently, it ‘was [an] act of Rome’, Dawson claimed, ‘that dragged Western Europe out of its barbaric isolation and united it with the civilised society of the Mediterranean world.’⁸⁶ In the years following the fall of the Western Empire, the political and social ideal of

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 27. Cf. Dawson, ‘Religion and the Life of Civilisation’ *The Quarterly Review*, no. 244 (1925): 112. In this article, Dawson describes the Hellenistic tradition and social ideals as the ‘religious vehicle’ of the Roman Empire, giving the tradition and ideals a dynamic character by allowing them to cross religious and racial barriers.

⁸⁵ *ME*, 26.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

Imperial Rome inspired the Frankish and Germanic kings such as Charlemagne and Otto I to rebuild Imperial unity.

In the last days of the Roman Empire, the superficial unity created and sustained by the secular culture of Rome was not to last, as the extensive but brittle bureaucracy of the Empire was unable to support or adapt to the social and political changes occurring within as well as outside its boundaries. In contrast to Gibbon's thesis about the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, Dawson argued that the forces of disintegration were already at play before the expansion of Christianity in the third and fourth centuries. Unlike the other hundreds of mystery cults of the era, Christianity was able to create a steadfast social authority that allowed for its continued expansion and stability even as the Empire began to collapse around it.⁸⁷

In the West, the organization of the Catholic Church – the second element in the formation of Europe – ultimately replaced the civic organization of Rome and achieved something that the Empire had not been able to achieve: a breadth of influence and authority that reached from one end of the social spectrum to the other. Ironically, the new leaders within society were individuals such as St. Augustine, St. Benedict, St. Gregory, and St. Boniface, who focussed their minds on the primacy of the spiritual and moral orders rather than on the solely secular issues usually associated with social and political influence. Augustine was the central figure in building the bridge leading to the cultural development after the fall of Rome because he had one foot in the classical tradition and another in the medieval.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Cervantes, 'Dawson and Europe', 56-57.

⁸⁸ In his article 'Augustine and His Age,' written two years before *The Making of Europe*, Dawson described Augustine as 'essentially a man of his own age [and]... no mere passive spectator of the crisis. He was, to a far greater degree than any emperor or general or barbarian war-lord, a

Augustine's ideas as expressed in his *City of God* 'set forth the programme which was to inspire the ideals of the new age.'⁸⁹ Dawson perceived Augustine's teachings as fundamental to cultural developments that were not fully expressed until the Renaissance. 'The sociology of St. Augustine,' he wrote, 'is based on the same psychological principle which pervades his whole thought – the principle of the all-importance of the will and the sovereignty of love.'⁹⁰ Considering this, Russell Hittinger explains:

If it is true – as historians have insisted for quite some time – that St. Augustine's *City of God* was the foundational treatise for the Christian Church and culture in the West, it exerted such an influence ... because he [Augustine] anchored the framework for synthetic activity in what Dawson calls the 'deeper law of spiritual duality and polarization'.^[91] For Dawson, this is the point that has to be grasped above all else ... Though it may seem paradoxical, the eschatological and moral dualism emphasized in the Augustinian tradition enabled the Western Church to envisage the 'prospect of a Christian age and civilization' precisely because it was not conceived of as a 'millennial kingdom' but a field of continual effort and conflict.⁹²

It was the study of Augustine's ideas by subsequent generations that led to the medieval preoccupation with the *sub specie aeternitatis*. '*Diem hominis non desideravi*,' Dawson noted, '[was] the essential conviction of the age ... one ... that is difficult for the modern who views all history *sub specie humanitatis* to appreciate'⁹³ Yet Dawson was far from exaggerating the religious qualities of

maker of history and a builder of a bridge which was to lead from the old world to the new. See also Scott, *Historian*, 98. Dawson's description of Augustine as a 'maker of history' and 'a builder of a bridge' is a vivid description of how the essentially cyclical nature of history is suspended for linear movement towards spiritual ends.

⁸⁹ *ME*, 171-172.

⁹⁰ *ME*, 172.

⁹¹ In the previous chapter, I have described this same 'duality and polarization' as a 'dialectic.' Hittinger did not cite this quotation from Dawson in his article and unfortunately I have been unsuccessful in locating it for reference here.

⁹² Hittinger, 'Metahistorical Vision', 22.

⁹³ *ME*, 18.

Europeans during the early medieval period. 'If that age was an age of faith', he explained,

it was not merely on account of its external religious profession; still less does it mean that the men of that age were more moral or more humane or more just in their social and economic relations than the men of to-day. It is rather because they had no faith in themselves or in the possibilities of human effort, but put their trust in something more than civilisation and something outside history. The foundations of Europe were laid in fear and weakness and suffering ... yet the sense of despair and unlimited impotence and abandonment that the disasters of the time provoked was not inconsistent with a spirit of courage and self-devotion which inspired men to heroic effort and superhuman activity.⁹⁴

As well as singling out the social and political contributions of the Catholic church to the future of Europe, Dawson also emphasized how important the Eastern church was to the formation of a 'profound and exact intellectual statement of Christian doctrine'; through Eastern Orthodoxy, Europe avoided 'an unintelligent traditionalism,' as in the case of many of the mystery cults, and the 'superficial rationalisation of Christianity' as expressed in Arianism.⁹⁵ By the efforts of the Eastern church, and more specifically those of its fathers, such as Origen and Eusebius, two seemingly incompatible systems of thought – the social and theological spirit of Christianity and the 'sterile' and 'sophisticated' philosophy of Hellenism – were synthesized into a single system. The fusion of these two systems, according to Dawson, created cultural expansion that enabled further understanding of a transcendent reality as the end of all intellectual and artistic efforts, a factor later characteristic of the cultural expansion throughout Europe during the Renaissance. Dermot Quinn explains:

Dawson made due acknowledgement of Europe's Greek roots. Without Platonism and its elaborations 'Europe' as an ideal would have been impossible ... Christianity above all changed Europe, turning a

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

philosophically finite Hellenism into a culture with extraordinary powers of adaption, expansion, self-understanding, and capacity for the infinite.⁹⁶

If it had not been for classical culture, Europe would have been intellectually impoverished, especially in the areas of science and philosophy. Yet at the same time, if it were not for the influence of Christianity on Hellenistic ideals, the latter could very well have remained outside the cultural development of Europe.⁹⁷

Fernando Cervantes noted that Dawson believed that the three elements discussed above were the 'formative' influences which 'shaped the material of Europe,' while the 'obscure chaos of the Barbarian world' provided the material itself, rather than merely giving life to a surviving remnant of the old Western Empire. By contrast, most modern historians of Dawson's era believed barbarism to have been an enemy to civilization, not the makers of it. Indeed, as Daniel O'Connor observed, most historians generally agreed that the time was one of 'chaos, barbarism, of savage and meaningless wars ... fruitless religious strife, and a time when civilization almost perished.'⁹⁸ While Dawson would have agreed with most of these historians that the period was chaotic both socially and politically, the undue attention given to these external features gave support to his rationale that 'modern historians, especially in England, have frequently tended to use the present as an absolute standard by which to judge the past, and to view all history as an inevitable movement of progress that culminates in the present state of things.'⁹⁹ 'Far from being a passive and negative background for the creative activities of the higher culture of the Mediterranean,' Cervantes writes, 'the

⁹⁶Quinn, 'Catholic Idea of History', 80.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 243.

⁹⁸Cervantes, 'Dawson and Europe', 58; Daniel A. O'Connor, *The Relation Between Religion and Culture according to Christopher Dawson* (Montreal: Libraire-Viateur, 1952), 71.

⁹⁹*ME*, 16.

barbarian peoples had their own cultural traditions which stretched back to the Bronze Age and which became fundamental to European culture. To give but one example, the principle of kinship, as opposed to citizenship and the emphasis on the authority of the State, contributed to the development of the European ideals of personal freedom and self-respect based on a spirit of loyalty and devotion to the community.¹⁰⁰

It was the monastic tradition in the North-West that allowed for the Christianisation of the pagan religion of the Barbarians on the Continent. St. Boniface brought the social and political elements of the English monastic tradition to northern Europe. Thus it was in these monasteries that the Franks and Germans became fully immersed in the intellectual elements of the classical tradition and the cultural leaven of the social teachings of Christianity. From a socio-political perspective, the rural demography was important to the survival of this dynamic because the monks were less prone to secularizing forces which constantly plagued the bishops in the cities.¹⁰¹ The influence of the ascetics played the important role of balancing the spiritual authority of the Church and papacy with what little temporal authority remained after the decline of the Western Empire, while at the same time remaining grounded in the intellectual tradition of the classical era. The result was a cultural revolution throughout the Frankish and Saxon kingdoms, which led eventually to 'an intensification of social activity' of which the Carolingian Renaissance was the fruit.

As important as Dawson believed the Carolingian Renaissance was to the cultural life and future unity of Europe, Cervantes noted that Dawson also believed that its importance 'lay not in its political or economic or even its cultural

¹⁰⁰ Cervantes, 'Dawson and Europe', 58.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

achievements, but rather in its embodiment and representation of an ideal of unity which already incorporated the four elements ... foundational to the European tradition.¹⁰² The ideal of unity was far from being realised, however, because he believed the Carolingian Empire was an 'artificial administrative centralization,' a weakness apparent in its disintegration after the rule of Louis the Pious. In the period of political and social chaos that followed, the Church 'remained and continued to keep alive the traditions of higher civilisation' in the West in spite of the chaos within its own walls.¹⁰³ 'The vital problem of the tenth century,' Dawson suggested, 'was whether ... feudal barbarism was to capture and absorb the peace-society of the Church, or whether the latter could succeed in imposing its ideals and its higher culture on the feudal nobility as it had formerly done with the barbarian monarchies of the Anglo-Saxons and the Franks.'¹⁰⁴

It was not until Otto I that the Carolingian tradition became prominent once again in the political ethos of Western Europe. It was during this revival of Carolingian idealism that the 'Empire gradually lost its Saxon character and became an international power,' as seen especially in the imperialism of Otto's grandson Otto III.¹⁰⁵ Dawson believed that the political policies of Otto III were fundamental to the 'emergence of a new European consciousness [for] all the forces that went to make up the unity of medieval Europe are represented in it – the Byzantine and Carolingian traditions of the Christian Empire and the ecclesiastical universalism of the Papacy, the spiritual ideals of monastic reformers, such as St. Nilus and St. Romuald, and the missionary spirit of St Adalbert, the Carolingian

¹⁰² Cervantes, 'Dawson and Europe', 60.

¹⁰³ *ME*, 227.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 235.

humanism of Gerbert, and the national devotion of Italians like Leo of Vercelli to the Roman idea. Thus it marks the point at which the traditions of the past age flow together and are merged in the new culture of the mediaeval West. It looks back to St. Augustine and Justinian, and forward to Dante and the Renaissance.'¹⁰⁶

The ideal of the Holy Roman Empire, then, was a 'vital modification in the Carolingian imperial tradition. The unity of Christendom was no longer conceived as the unity of an imperialist autocracy, a kind of Germanic Tsardom, but as a society of free peoples under the precedence of the Roman Pope and Emperor. Hitherto conversion to Christianity had involved political dependence and the destruction of national tradition ...'¹⁰⁷ The European ideal was in place as early as the eleventh century as Northern paganism was replaced by Christianity, creating a 'new series of Christian states extending from Scandinavia to the Danube.' Moreover, Dawson admitted that while 'Otto III's ideal of the Empire as a commonwealth of Christian peoples governed by the concordant and interdependent authorities of Emperor and Pope was never destined to be realised in practice,' still it had 'preserved a kind of ideal existence like that of a Platonic form, which was continually seeking to attain material realisation in the life of mediaeval society.'¹⁰⁸

In the final analysis, Dawson's interpretation of European unity was that it was the product of a common cultural and religious ideal rather than a geographical or political reality – the latter he labelled the 'second phase of [European] unity.'¹⁰⁹ Eventually, by the time of the Renaissance in the fourteenth

¹⁰⁶ *ME*, 237.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 243.

century, geographical and political unity were emphasized as fundamental to the European identity. Perhaps the best explanation of his perspective on Europe is that he understood its historical unity very much as he did the idea of a Christian civilization – a society which receives its form by a common and continuous striving towards the realization of its social and religious ideals. 'That Dawson thought European unity to be important,' Cervantes noted, 'did not mean that he conceived it as an objective and quantifiable reality. European unity was 'the ultimate and unattained goal'; a goal, however, that was at the centre of the organic development of that complex and diversified cultural tradition to which he was profoundly conscious of belonging.'¹¹⁰ This organic ideal may not have been widely accepted, but Dawson believed any other attempt to explain the development of Europe failed to adequately explain the essence of the European consciousness.

From this perspective, Cervantes continued, 'Dawson argued that the medieval conception of Europe as a 'commonwealth of Christian peoples' was not only more adequate, but also 'more true to the historical and sociological realities' than the Renaissance ideal of absolute sovereignty and rationalized power politics which had dominated and divided modern Europe.'¹¹¹ In spite of the emphasis on the Christian essence which is central to his understanding of 'Europe,' he acknowledged that the 'contact with the higher civilisation of the Islamic and Byzantine world had a decisive influence on Western Europe.'¹¹² In fact, it was actually a loss of unity with these influences that led Western culture to become 'more self-sufficient and occidental than ever before' – factors which led to

¹¹⁰ Cervantes, 'Dawson and Europe', 55.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹¹² *ME*, 242-243.

spiritual disunity and therefore a fracturing of the common European ideal of Christendom. From this perspective, Dawson believed that only through a return to the 'common faith' of the medieval period could the 'common intellectual tradition' lead to European unity once more and the extension of that same unity throughout the world.¹¹³

Reactions to *The Making of Europe* immediately after its publication were generally positive. Aldous Huxley believed the book to be 'quite remarkable' and a work in which 'the Dark Ages lose their darkness [and] take on form and significance.' Likewise, P. J. Healy described the book as 'one of the real contributions to historical literature in recent years.'¹¹⁴ More recently, however, reactions have been mixed. Fernando Cervantes claims that Dawson was 'one of the first historians to assess the importance of the barbarians in the formation of Europe.'¹¹⁵ Cervantes also acknowledged *The Making of Europe*'s 'devastating criticisms of nationalist interpretations of European history and of the unrestricted development of the principle of sovereignty.'¹¹⁶ Similarly, Dermot Quinn has argued that 'making sense of Europe was indeed [Dawson's] significant

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹¹⁴ Aldous Huxley, 'Review of *The Making of Europe*', *Spectator*, 149 (1932): 235. Reprinted in *The Olive Tree and Other Essays*, pp. 132-137. P. J. Healy, 'Review of *The Making of Europe*', *Commonweal*, 17 (1933): 274-275. Other reviews of *The Making of Europe* include: T. Charles-Edwards, *Blackfriars*, 13 (1932): 411-415; H. A. L. Fisher, *English Review*, 55 (1932): 97-99; G. LeBras, *Journal des Savants*, 33 (1935): 256-263; W. E. Lingelbach, *Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 165 (1933): 239; F. McEachran, *Criterion*, 12 (1933): 290-292; Leo L. McVay, *Catholic Historical Review*, 20 (1934): 322-323; W. A. Marzolf, *Boston Evening Transcript*, (17 August 1932), 2; Alfred C. Rush, *Ecclesiastical Review*, 114 (1946): 236-237; J. T. E., *Historical Bulletin*, 11 (1933): 29. Unsigned reviews include: *American Political Science Review*, 26 (1932): 1140; *Booklist*, 29 (November, 1932): 68; *The Bookman*, 75 (1932): 801; *Catholic Worker*, 2 (June, 1934): 8; *Nation* 135 (1932): 575; *Saturday Review*, 153 (1932): 640; *Scrutiny* 2 (1933): 312; *TLS*, 23 June, 457.

¹¹⁵ Cervantes, 'Dawson and Europe', 58.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

achievement.'¹¹⁷ Even Paul Costello, who clearly has little affinity with the greater part of Dawson's overall historical perspective and apologetic program, admits that 'his studies of the mentality of the Middle Ages ... have intrinsic interest as well as value to the scholar His stress on the role of Christianity as the root of our civilization ... is an incisive antidote to the dominance in modern historiography of studies of the politics and economics of earlier periods His evaluation of the deep roots to the Christian tradition in the West and the legacy of that tradition in the modern mentality is a brilliant attempt to turn Nietzsche on his head.'¹¹⁸ Costello concludes his analysis of Dawson's career with the affirmation that 'Dawson's historical works [on] the making of Europe demonstrate solid scholarship and extensive erudition.'¹¹⁹

Acknowledgement of Dawson's contribution to the historiography of Europe, however, was and continues to be rare among historians such as Costello who are unsympathetic to Dawson's *pro causa dei*. Apart from his contemporaries in the Catholic intellectual revival and other like-minded conservatives, Dawson's thesis was either dismissed or highlighted as an exaggerated attempt to outline the development of European unity. Perhaps one of the most noteworthy historians who criticised Dawson for exaggerating the unifying value of the medieval ethos was the historian Hayden White. In an article written early in his career, in the late 1950s, White charged Dawson with basing his conclusions on an overly romanticised affinity with the medieval period that was not dissimilar to the

¹¹⁷Quinn, 'Catholic Idea of History' in Stratford Caldecott and John Morrill (eds.) *Eternity in Time* (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke, 1997), 79.

¹¹⁸Paul Costello, *World Historians and Their Goals: Twentieth-Century Answers to Modernism* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1994), 152.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 152-153.

perspectives of nineteenth-century romantics.¹²⁰ In a position even less complimentary than that of White, Ann Elizabeth Woolever concluded in her thesis, written in the last decade of Dawson's life that his argument for European unity is the product of biased teleology and should be rejected as idealistic historicism which, in the years following *The Making of Europe*, was revealed to be essentially fascist in principle.¹²¹

While still relatively obscure, Dawson's idea of Europe continues periodically to generate debate now and again, as seen in Stuart Woolf's recent reference to Dawson in his article on the histories of Europe written during the twentieth century. Like White and Woolever, Stuart Woolf criticized his 'teleological attempt' to place Christian culture at the centre of the European identity.¹²² Indeed, since the Second World War, Dawson's vision of European unity declined in popularity among historians who analysed his works. However, it is important to consider whether or not the charges against his thesis are fair. Clearly Dawson's thesis has its weaknesses, primarily through overstated generalizations and the relatively brief description of Eastern Europe's place in the identity, but if one is to believe the analyses of White, Woolever, and Woolf, Dawson's conclusions should be rejected as little more than romantic renderings of the culture of the medieval tradition on the grounds that he was a staunch medievalist who idealized the period and was thus unable to extend beyond his

¹²⁰ Hayden White, 'Religion, Culture and Western Civilization in Christopher Dawson's Idea of History', *English Miscellany* (Rome: 1958): 287. For a similar position see Geoffrey Barraclough, *European Unity in Thought and Action* (London, 1961).

¹²¹ Woolever, 'Christopher Dawson', 350-352. These fascist allegations will be given extensive attention in the following chapter.

¹²² See Woolf, 326-327. Woolf ultimately places *The Making of Europe* in the same category with other books by authors such as Spengler, Toynbee, Ernest Barker, George Clarke, Paul Vaucher and John Bowle among others. For the latter authors see Ernest Barker, George Clarke and Paul Vaucher (eds.) *The European Inheritance*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954); John Bowle, *The Unity of European History* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1948).

own teleology. Woolf's conclusions, moreover, reveal the all-too-easy tendency to dismiss Dawson's idea of Europe by placing it on the same level as those of Spengler and Toynbee, a tendency to which even Costello falls victim. While it is true that he wrote during the same time as these historians, it has become clear in the most recent analyses of Dawson's thesis that there is in his 'idea' of Europe a greater profundity and academic honesty than in most of the views of his contemporaries.

Dawson's revision of the term 'Dark Ages' was ahead of its time. Today, there are very few historians of Medieval Europe who would acknowledge the validity of such a biased and generalized labelling of that era. He was correct in charging modern historians with what Bertrand Russell so aptly described as 'parochialism in time.'¹²³ By looking beyond the assumptions of the generation of historians such as Michelet and Macaulay, Dawson was able to develop a fairer assessment of the 'Dark Ages' and acknowledge that period's contributions to the development of modern European identity, even if he tended to neglect the material, non-religious elements also important to the formation of a European consciousness.

Although Dawson's notions of European development and unity lacks nuance, he should not be understood essentially as an overly romantic medievalist with, for example, the same vision as Belloc or the Marquess of Bute. In spite of what one may think of Dawson's conclusions regarding the medieval heritage of modern Europe, critics of his analysis of this 'heritage' often have failed to acknowledge that he was well aware of the disadvantages created by focussing too heavily on those issues which would clearly advance the medievalist cause.

¹²³ Bertrand Russell quoted in *ME*, 16. Dawson uses Russell's words not only to criticise modern historians but the general mind-set of modern society in general. (p.16)

Dawson warned readers of the danger he saw in 'using history as a weapon against the modern age, either on account of a romantic idealisation of the past, or in the interests of religious or national propaganda.'¹²⁴ More than any type of historian of the medieval period, Dawson believed that the Catholic historian in particular was the most guilty of a-historical scholarship. 'The propagandist historian,' he continued,

is inspired by motives of a non-historical order, and tends unconsciously to falsify history in the interests of apologetics. This is a danger to which Catholic historians of the Middle Ages are peculiarly exposed, since the romantic revival first brought in the conception of the Middle Ages as 'The Ages of Faith,' and of medieval culture as the social expression of Catholic ideals. [For] the last century and more there has been a tendency among Catholic writers to make history a department of apologetics and to idealise mediaeval culture in order to exalt their religious ideals.¹²⁵

To be sure, Dawson's contention was just as much with the general Catholic perspective as well as the modern, as both had approached the subject with their respective agendas. Lamenting the lack of middle ground, Dawson was merely attempting to revise what he felt were fundamental misinterpretations of the medieval ethos among all his contemporaries, Catholic or not. 'That the book could seem both 'impartial' and yet come from a 'Catholic standpoint',' Allitt has noted, 'was a tribute to Dawson's moderation and scholarly care.' As in so many other ways it was very far removed from Hilaire Belloc's argument 'frequently delivered with the rhetorical hammer' that "Europe is the Faith".¹²⁶ Further, while some historians have claimed that Dawson may have strategically mentioned the tendency for Catholic scholars to falsify the period in order to make his own claims more legitimate, this accusation does not hold up under the scrutiny of his thesis.

¹²⁴ *ME*, 16.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

¹²⁶ Allitt, 254.

The Making of Europe was and continues to be an exceptional book on the subject of the early medieval period. One need not accept Dawson's thesis and his obvious apologetic intent to appreciate the depth of the scholarship behind it. On the one hand, in spite of his proximity to the nineteenth century, his ideas were hardly Eurocentric as he devoted some of the book to the Byzantine and Muslim influences leading to the Western identity.¹²⁷ On the other, he successfully looked beyond the traditionally held understanding of Europe as the product of purely Greco-Roman ideals, and included the frequently ignored social and political legacy of Christianity and Barbarism to European life. The book does, however, suffer from generalizations and abstractions that possibly blur the various nuances in the modern European identity apart from the Christian influences. Cervantes recognizes this tendency in Dawson but dismisses it as, if anything, an overstatement of Dawson's observations rather than misguided exaggeration.¹²⁸ Moreover, to the majority of present day historians who are suspicious of the kind of historiography that reaches beyond the narrow parameters of specialisation, Dawson's meta-historical perspective, emphasizing a reinstatement of the pre-modern ideals of Europe, seems at best a naive and outmoded assessment. Consequently, it is highly unlikely that many of today's historians of medieval Europe will unconditionally embrace Dawson's perspective.

By writing *The Making of Europe*, Dawson had inadvertently entered a political arena that, had he known of the volatility and complexity of the issues of the time, he probably would have avoided. The renewed interest of the post-World War One era in the European identity had not only produced the melancholic messages of Spengler and Toynbee but also the malicious mis-interpretations of

¹²⁷ See Cervantes, 'Dawson and Europe', 63, 65-6; Allitt, 239.

¹²⁸ Cervantes, 'Dawson and Europe', 60.

the Teutonic aspects of Northern Europe, which had become central to the creeds of many expressions of fascism and, of course, National Socialism. Before his involvement with the journal *Order*, Dawson's commentary on contemporary politics had been confined to references in larger works. He was interested in the political issues only as they related to the decline of Christian culture in Europe. Thus, direct political commentary was of secondary interest to his other historical and sociological projects. At the same time, there was an essentially political character implicit in Dawson's publications that did not go unnoticed by those who had more forthright political agendas.

“The Convegno Volta” (November, 1932)

In the same year of the publication of *The Making of Europe*, Dawson received an invitation from Signor Guglielmo Marconi, the President of the Royal Academy of Italy, to deliver a paper at “The Convegno Volta” to be held in Rome later that year.¹²⁹ The subject to be discussed at the conference (which was later discovered by Dawson to be little more than what could be termed a fascist rally) was “Europe.” The list of guests to this conference comprised a glittering array of politicians, novelists, historians, economists, and writers. The British contingent, however, was small (only five) due to the fact that most of those invited – Winston Churchill, Austen Chamberlain, Stanley Baldwin, Hugh Dalton, Lloyd George, John Maynard Keynes, Hilaire Belloc, and Rudyard Kipling – had not accepted the invitation. Some of the more notable guests who did attend included Hermann Göring, president of the Reichstag and later head of the German Luftwaffe, and Alfred Rosenberg, one of Hitler’s earliest masterminds. Knowing today the convictions of some of those who attended the conference, it might be difficult to believe that Dawson had no affinity with the political philosophy of those attending. The title and thesis of his paper, however, eliminates any suspicions of his acceptance at least of the racist aspects of fascism.

¹²⁹The information for this section is taken from Scott, *Historian*, 104-107.

Dawson's paper was entitled "Interracial Cooperation as a Factor in European Culture."¹³⁰ With the themes of his earlier writings governing his content, he wrote,

[In the early modern period] a new conception of culture ... ignored the essentially composite character of the European tradition and derived everything from the independent creative activity of a pure national or racial stock. And hence the relatively benign Nationalism of the early Romantics paved the way for the fanaticism of the modern pan-racial theorists who subordinate civilization to skull measurements and who infuse an element of racial hatred into the political and economic rivalries of European peoples.¹³¹

Dawson's conclusion was especially poignant given his audience: "[If] we were to subtract from German culture ... all the contributions made by men who were not of pure Nordic type, German culture would be incalculably impoverished."¹³² One can only imagine the displeasure of Nazis in attendance such as G ering and Rosenberg at these claims.

The thesis of Dawson's paper was implicitly the same as that of *The Making of Europe*: any attempt to create unity in Europe must be rooted in the historic realities that gave rise to the European consciousness. Once again he decried the national elements of modern historiography as incongruent with the realities to be found in the earlier development of Europe. This paper was only a minor event in Dawson's career, yet it revealed his lack of affinity with fascist thought and ideals, a point considered more throughout the following chapter. Christina Scott recorded that he had little admiration for Mussolini's Rome and

¹³⁰ Republished as Christopher Dawson, "Interracial Cooperation as a Factor of European Culture" (Reale Accademia D'Italia: Convegno Volta, 1932).

¹³¹ Dawson, "Interracial Cooperation", 102.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 102.

even less for the cold and practical state organization his political system had created.¹³³

Although Dawson would eventually provide more direct commentary on the political environment of Europe in the mid 1930s, he continued to concentrate on the more general historical themes he had dealt upon in the 1920s. This is clear from his return to the less volatile subjects that had characterized his publications in the 1920s.

¹³³Scott, *Historian*, 107.

Enquiries into Religion and Culture (1933)

Enquiries into Religion and Culture was an anthology of several of the articles that Dawson had published before in journals such as *The Sociological Review* and *The Dublin Review*.¹³⁴ Therefore, although they were not original in theme or orientation, what was original in comparison to his earlier works was the manner in which the themes develop toward what amounts to an expressive, yet oftentimes ambiguous call for the reorganization of the cultural life of modern Europe.

Structurally, *Enquiries* is divided into three sections. The first section includes the majority of Dawson's essays in which he attempted to provide a critique of modern economic principles and the danger they pose to the life of the individual as well as to the culture of Western Civilization.¹³⁵ The second section

¹³⁴ Christopher Dawson, *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (1933; New York, Books for Library Press, 1968: reprint), hereafter *ERC*. There were at least 12 reviews of *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* published. They include: H.L. Binsse, *American Review*, 1 (1933): 373-376; Leo L. McVay, *Catholic Historical Review*, 21 (1935): 108; W.A. Marzolf, *Boston Evening Transcript*, 26 August 1933, p.4; Robert Park, *American Journal of Sociology*, 41 (1935): 109-111; T.L. Riggs, *Commonweal*, 18 (1933): 350; J.J. Rolbiecki, *Catholic Educational Review*, 32 (1934): 122. Reviews that were only initialled include J.McS., *Catholic World*, 138 (1933): 242; F.X.T., *America*, 49 (1933): 473. Reviews that were unsigned include: *Boston Evening Transcript*, 2 August 1933, p.2; *Ecclesiastical Review*, 90 (1934): 325-327; *Scrutiny* 2 (December, 1933): 312; *TLS*, 29 June 1933, p. 446.

¹³⁵ Christopher Dawson, 'The Passing of Industrialism', *The Sociological Review*, no. 12 (1920): 6-17; 'The New Leviathan', *The Dublin Review*, no. 185 (1929): 88-102; 'The Significance of Bolshevism', *The English Review*, 55 (1932):239-50; 'The World Crisis and the English Tradition', *The English Review*, 56 (1933): 248-260.

is composed of his earlier sociological articles, such as 'Cycles of Civilisation' and 'Religion and the Life of Civilisation.'¹³⁶ Finally, the third section is composed of articles with themes that relate to the formation of Western culture. It should not be surprising that his first publication, 'The Nature and Destiny of Man,' was chosen to conclude the book, as it laid stress on the ideals of the Catholic doctrine of man.¹³⁷

If there is one book that could be viewed as Dawson's intellectual autobiography, it is *Enquiries*. It was, after all, the first compilation of all his ideas that had developed since the start of his career in 1920. From the critique of modern economic structures and rising tension within European political life to the sociological and philosophical basis of Europe, the book is a glimpse into Dawson's struggles with the modern nation state. He asserted in his introduction to the book that drastic measures were needed to save Europe from continued cultural decay. 'All genuine thought,' he wrote,

is rooted in personal needs, and my own thought since the war, and indeed for some years previously, is due to the need that so many of us feel to-day for social readjustment and for the recovery of a vital contact between the spiritual life of the individual and the social and economic organisation of modern culture.¹³⁸

In spite of his call for 'social readjustment' within the life of modern Western Civilisation, Dawson was quick to point out that 'the problem of social survival is not only a political or economic one; it is above all things religious, since it is in religion that the ultimate spiritual roots both of society and of the

¹³⁶ Dawson, 'Cycles of Civilisation', 51-68; 'Religion and the Life of Civilisation', 98-115.

¹³⁷ Christopher Dawson, 'The Nature and Destiny of Man' in Fr. Cuthbert O.F.S.C. (ed.) *God and the Supernatural* (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1920).

¹³⁸ *ERC*, v.

individual are to be found.’¹³⁹ Thus, ‘it is no more possible,’ he argued, ‘for society to live by bread alone than it is for the individual. Technology and material organisation are not enough. If our civilisation is to recover its vitality or even to survive, it must cease to neglect its spiritual roots and must realise that religion is not a matter of personal sentiment which has nothing to do with the objective realities of society The desecularisation of modern civilisation is no easy matter; at first sight it may seem a hopeless task. But we can at least prepare the way for it by desecularising our intellectual outlook and opening our eyes to the existence of the spiritual forces that create and transform civilisation.’¹⁴⁰

At times throughout the book Dawson’s message is often ambiguous and contradictory, a weakness that would plague his publications in the years preceding the Second World War. Even in 1933, he seemed to suggest that a top-down reorganization of society is needed, while at the same time emphasizing apolitical needs that extend beyond the reorganizing of society. A reconciliation of these ideas is not so much a contradiction as it is vague and lacking in substance.

Of greatest interest in the book are the two sections entitled ‘Islamic Mysticism’ and ‘On Spiritual Intuition in Christian Philosophy.’¹⁴¹ The section ‘Islamic Mysticism’ highlights the universality of a consciousness of the spiritual order that transcends cultural boundaries and mystical schools. Distinct from, yet fundamentally similar to Christian mysticism, Islamic mysticism, as most clearly in Sufism, subjugated the material order to the spiritual. In the religious and

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, vi.

¹⁴⁰ *ERC*, x.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 159-190; 191-197. ‘Islamic Mysticism’ originally published as ‘Islamic Mysticism’ *The Dublin Review*, no. 186 (1930): 34-61; ‘On Spiritual Intuition in Christian Philosophy’ originally published as ‘The Dark Mirror’ with a post-script entitled ‘Spiritual Intuition in Christian Philosophy’ *The Dublin Review*, no. 187 (1930): 177-200.

philosophical structure of Islam, however, 'the transcendence and omnipotence of Allah carried to their logical conclusions, involved the denial of any ultimate reality to created being and to human experience. God was the Real (al-Haqq), all else was vanity and nothingness.'¹⁴² While this leads to 'a juxtaposition of unintelligible states of being' and ultimately a 'blind fatalism' to the 'arbitrary fiat of divine omnipotence,' it at least takes seriously the relationship between the spiritual and the material. The Sufis represented a minority within the theological tradition of Islam which was not satisfied with this closed perspective that left no room for the open and dynamic character of mysticism; Sufis strive to feel the divine essence, to know the absolute, and ultimately to achieve access to both, creating a 'genuine religious attitude.'¹⁴³ Dawson concedes:

[W]ith all its faults and weaknesses, the Sufi movement remains one of the great witnesses outside Christianity to the religious need of humanity The Sufi may reason like a pantheist, but when he prays it is with the humility and adoration of a creature in the presence of his creator¹⁴⁴

However, the ultimate failure of Sufism – a failure which Dawson believed was a result of its monist viewpoint which makes no distinction between the spiritual and the temporal orders – has been its inability to counteract the 'harsh realities of existence' by grounding its philosophy in a social context.¹⁴⁵ In contrast, Christian mysticism emphasized a 'real transformation or assimilation of the human soul to God' and 'is nothing but the experimental realisation and personal appropriation of the new relationship of mankind to God which is involved by the Incarnation.'¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² *ERC*, 180.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 184-185.

Unlike Sufism, Christianity and its mystical elements emphasize the benefits of this relationship through an emphasis on both individual and social transformation. Dawson's writings would suggest that he believed it was this two-fold objective that had given Christianity its strength and the West the dynamic culture that had caused it to surpass all others in cultural achievement.¹⁴⁷

Dawson's comparison of Islamic mysticism with Christian mysticism contains several important points, and therefore reveals his perspective about the relationship between the temporal and spiritual orders that was central to his political commentaries in the latter half of the 1930s. Clearly, the history of Christian mysticism has revealed that the Christian faith can meet the fundamental needs of the individual with, at the same time, the ability to transform society. In spite of its ability to provide a social transformation of the temporal order, however, it is the freedom of the spiritual order that allows for such change. In other words, Christianity as a cultural force is most dynamic when politically it is 'in the world but not of it.'

This has tremendous implications for a proper understanding of Dawson's outlook on religion and politics. Contrary to the opinion of Woolever, Dawson did not look to Islamic theocracy as an ideal or possible model for a 'Christian government.'¹⁴⁸ If anything, he warned of the union of the spiritual and temporal as it always led to the secularization of the former and thus a reduction in the possibilities of the all-important spiritual influence. The only affinity he had with theocracies, such as Islam, was that they recognized that the state has ends that extended beyond a quest for economic and social stability. Throughout the history of Western civilization, the Church was continually fighting amalgamation with

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Dawson, 'St. Augustine', 300-305.

¹⁴⁸ Woolever, 137, 349.

the state, even if at times it seemed as though Church leaders idealized such a relationship. For Dawson, the relationship between the church and state in the Byzantine Empire was the clearest example of the dangers of a theocratic system. 'The Byzantine culture,' he observed, 'faithfully preserved its original tradition, but it was powerless to create new social forms and new cultural ideals. Its spiritual and social life was cast in the fixed mould of the Byzantine church-state and when that fell there was no basis for a new social effort.'¹⁴⁹

In Byzantium there was at least a recognition of the strengths of a church-state relationship, but this ideal had all but disappeared in much of Europe except for several predominantly Catholic countries such as Spain, Portugal and Austria, all of which had experienced in the 1930s a strong reassertion of the social role of religion.¹⁵⁰ One of Dawson's preoccupations from his earliest article in 1920 was his defence of a Church that was independent from the state. Although in principle church and state were separated, he believed that the state was encroaching on religious freedom as well as the general freedom of the individual through technological and economic mechanization. To counteract this destructive trend, what was needed were nations that recognized the primacy of the spiritual order and invited the Church and its moral authority – seen clearest in the papal encyclicals – to be leaven in its socio-economic affairs. Dawson would revisit this theme more deliberately in the years following 1935. In the meantime, however, he continued to centre his attention on historical themes that displayed the positive

¹⁴⁹ *ME*, 165.

¹⁵⁰ In the latter half of the 1930s, Dawson supported these nations as representative of his ideals for the role religion should play in a nation state. See, for examples, Christopher Dawson, 'The Moral of Austria', *The Tablet*, no. 171 (1938): 538; 'Church, State, and Community', *The Tablet*, no. 169 (1937): 873-75, 909-910.

role a 'genuine religious attitude' could bring to bear on individuals and society in general.¹⁵¹

At the same time he was compiling the content for *Enquiries*, Dawson was writing his book *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement* which analysed a period of English history during which various men did indeed embrace the existence of 'spiritual forces' and sought to shape their own contemporary situation through both debate and practical effort.¹⁵² The Oxford Movement was a concrete example of how the 'desecularising' of a perspective can influence the culture of the era. The movement was, for Dawson, a high water mark in the religious history of modern England, and a beacon for future insight and inspiration as he and his contemporaries struggled with their own cultural crises, especially the most widely-held opinion about the modern nation state and the mechanization of human life to which it was leading, something he referred to as the 'new leviathan.'

¹⁵¹ *ERC*, 189.

¹⁵² Christopher Dawson, *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement* (1933; London: Sheed and Ward, 1945: reprint); hereafter *SOM*.

The Spirit of the Oxford Movement (1933)

Containing only 126 pages, *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement* was Dawson's shortest book.¹⁵³ Although it was written in part to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the very earliest days of the movement, his primary motive for writing the work was to revise traditionally held views of the movement by arguing for what he saw as its true significance in the religious history of England: its stand for an 'objective view of spiritual truth'.¹⁵⁴ Contrary to the vast majority of opinions, Dawson believed the movement's enduring aspects were not to be found in the conservative counter-arguments of the High Church *per se* but in the personal religious ideals of such prominent individuals as Keble and Newman, both of whom championed 'the spiritual freedom of the Apostolic Church and the Catholic inheritance of the Church of the Fathers'.¹⁵⁵ Thus, in contrast to the

¹⁵³ Reviews of *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement* include: Joseph T. Durkin, S.J., *Thought*, 9 (1934): 325-326; Humphrey J.T. Johnson, *Dublin Review*, 217 (1945): 193-194; Ben Ray Redman, *Books*, 10 (21 January 1934): 12. Reviews that were only initialled include N.F.P. *Downside Review*, 52 (1934): 196-201; W.H.W. *America*, 50 (1934): 430-431; *Boston Evening Transcript*, 27 December 1933, p.3; *Catholic World*, 138 (1934): 504-505; *Irish Monthly*, 73 (1945): 544; *Sign*, 13 (1934): 574; *TLS*, 26 October 1933, p. 735. For reviews of Dawson's book see Nigel J. Abercrombie, *Dublin Review*, 194 (1934): 159-61; Osbert Burdett, *English Review*, 58 (1934): 118-119; J. Courmos, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 10 (1934): 149-155; C. F. Harrold, *Sewanee Review*, 136 (1934): 244-247; Ben Redman, *New York Herald Tribune Books*, 21 January 1934, p.12.

¹⁵⁴ *SOM*, 121.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

widely held opinions about the contemporary significance of the movement, it was in these ideals that the 'true genesis' of the Oxford Movement as well as its relevance to the interwar years may be found.¹⁵⁶

The Spirit of the Oxford Movement was only one of many essays written by numerous historians and theologians in the years leading up to the centenary of the Movement.¹⁵⁷ The great mass of works provided almost every interpretation possible. One publication by Geoffrey Faber entitled *Oxford Apostles: A Character Study of the Oxford Movement* went as far as to attempt to interpret the movement through a Freudian lens, accusing Hurrell Froude, one of its leaders, of homosexuality and the movement in general of being 'an essay in sexual psychopathy.'¹⁵⁸ Dawson was familiar with the work and in a letter to George Every described the book as 'pitiable.' While Faber's judgement is an exception in its evaluation of the Movement, it does bespeak of the numerous misinterpretations to which Dawson was responding.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁵⁷The number of essays is too numerous to cite them all (there were close to 100 published between 1932 and 1934) but a few are mentioned here for comparison. See W. Emery Barnes, *After the Celebration of the Oxford Movement: Some Considerations* (Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes, 1933); B.C. Boulter, *The Anglican Reformers* (London: Philip Allan, 1933); Edgar George Bowring, *The Oxford Movement* (London: Church Association, 1932); W. Bardsley Brash, 'The Oxford Movement' *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* 158 (1933): 145-156; Osbert Burdett, 'What of the Oxford Movement?' *Nineteenth Century and After* 114 (1933): 215-225; Lord Hugh Cecil, 'The Oxford Movement: Our Debt to the Tractarians', *Spectator*, (5 May 1933): 634-635; C.P.S. Clarke, *The Oxford Movement and After* (London: Mowbray, 1932); F. L. Cross, *Preaching in the Anglo-Catholic Revival in the Oxford Movement Centenary Series* (London: SPCK, 1933); Sidney Dark, 'The Oxford Centenary', *Saturday Review*, (8 July 1933): 35-37; Geoffrey Faber, *Oxford Apostles: A Character Study of the Oxford Movement* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933); Kenneth Ingram, 'A Century of Anglo-Catholicism', *Bookman*, 84 (1933): 140-141; E.A. Knox, *The Tractarian Movement 1833-1845* (London: Putnam, 1933); Shane Leslie, *The Oxford Movement 1833-1933* (London: Burnes and Oates, 1933); Walter Lock, *Oxford Memories* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932); Desmond Morse-Boycott, *Lead Kindly light: Studies of the Saints and Heroes of the Oxford Movement* (London: Centenary Press, 1932); C. B. Moss, *The Orthodox Revival: 1833-1933* (London: Mowbray, 1933); E. G. Selwyn, 'The Oxford Movement', *Quarterly Review*, 260 (1933): 301-314; V. F. Storr, *The Oxford Movement: A Liberal Evangelical View* (London: SPCK for the Anglican Evangelical Group Movement, 1933); F. W. Vroom, 'The Oxford Movement: 1833-1933', *Dalhousie Review*, 13 (1933): 152-164.

¹⁵⁸ Geoffrey Faber, *Oxford Apostles: A Character Study of the Oxford Movement* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933), vi.

In general, Dawson believed most of the material written for the centenary to be narrow in scope and weak in analysis. He criticised the essays for being 'concerned with the Oxford Movement only in so far as it was the source and origin of the Anglo-Catholic development in the Church of England.'¹⁵⁹ As a result the movement was reduced to either 'panegyrics or criticisms' of a 'living ecclesiastical movement.'¹⁶⁰ In contrast to these views, Dawson viewed the period as a 'very original and characteristic phase of the English tradition' which, ironically, bore little if any resemblance to the faith of the heirs of the movement in the Anglo-Catholic tradition of his contemporaries.¹⁶¹

Dawson described the period as 'original and characteristic' because he believed it was at that moment that England was at last forced out of its 'spiritual isolation into contact with the main currents of western culture, with Catholicism and Liberalism.'¹⁶² For decades, England had maintained guarded neutrality as numerous revolutions on the continent re-shaped the traditional socio-religious structures of Europe. It was only a matter of time, however, before the liberal political ideals of philosophers such as Rousseau and Descartes would begin to shape the traditionally conservative social and political life of England. The election of the Whigs to power in 1830 allowed for the passing of a series of reforms of which all but one caused little upheaval among churchmen: the reform of the Church of Ireland. For many this move on the part of the government demanded answers to questions about the future of the relationship between the established Church and the State, leading many to ask what exactly was to become

¹⁵⁹ *SOM*, 7.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 9.

of the Church of England in light of the reforms.¹⁶³ The Oxford Movement, as it became known later in the decade, was the most vocal and prominent of conservative movements that criticized the Erastian tendencies of England's new Whig government.¹⁶⁴

To the original Tractarians, however, these tendencies were symptomatic of dangerous fundamental shifts in the cultural life of England. For Newman, Keble, Froude, and Pusey, what was at stake quickly became more profound than the political and religious consequences of Erastianism; it was rather the fundamental question of authority. It should be made clear that the Tractarians, in the conservative tradition of Burke and Coleridge, held in the highest esteem the relationship between church and state in England. Indeed, since the eighteenth century, this relationship was central to the political as well as the socio-religious structure of England. The Reform Bill, however, 'destroyed the bases of the old alliance.'¹⁶⁵ Therefore, Liberalism subtly eroded the once accepted truth of the authority of the National church in the life of the State. 'It is true,' Dawson noted, 'that the classical Anglican theory of Church and State still found champions in early Victorian times, notably in the young Gladstone and in Christopher Wordsworth Junior, but their paper ideals were easily vanquished by the hard common sense of a Liberal journalist of genius like Macaulay.'¹⁶⁶ The leaders of the Oxford Movement knew that they had entered an era vastly different than that

¹⁶³ John Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, I, (London: 1908), 54.

¹⁶⁴ Erastianism, in this context, is a term used to describe undue subservience of the Church to the State.

¹⁶⁵ *SOM*, 14.

¹⁶⁶ In two footnotes, Dawson provided the examples of W.G. Gladstone, *The State in Its Relations with the Church*, 1838; Christopher Wordsworth, *Theophilus Anglicanus*, 1843; as well as '[Macaulay's] famous article on Gladstone's book in *The Edinburgh Review*, April, 1839. See *SOM*, 14.

of their predecessors and 'accepted the breakdown of the old alliance and the passing of the old order. Their idea was not the Tudor Settlement, nor the Church-State of Hooker, nor even the quasi-Byzantine theocracy of Laud and Strafford: it was the spiritual freedom of the Apostolic Church and the Catholic inheritance of the Church of the Fathers.'¹⁶⁷ Since the end of the Movement in the mid-nineteenth century, it was this fundamental premise that was often overlooked by its heirs.

With them in mind, Dawson wrote,

The real religious issue before that age was not whether High Church or Low Church views should prevail in the Church of England, but whether the Christian religion should preserve its spiritual identity, or whether it should be transformed by the spirit of the age and absorbed into the secularized culture of the modern age.¹⁶⁸

For, as he concluded, Newman, Keble, Froude and Pusey 'all stood for Authority and Tradition against Liberalism, for Supernaturalism against Rationalism and Naturalism. The fundamental note of the Oxford Movement [therefore] was its *anti-modernism*.'¹⁶⁹

In sentiments that dated back to his years at Oxford, Dawson was critical of the path taken by Anglo-Catholicism in what seemed to be the opposite direction of the founders of the Movement.¹⁷⁰ The fact that Anglo-Catholicism used 'incense and Gregorian chant' in their worship would be of little interest to Keble and Newman. What they would desire to see, he contended, was whether or not 'there was more supernatural faith in the Church of England to-day than there was a century ago – whether there was a stronger hold on dogma and a more objective

¹⁶⁷ *SOM*, 15.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹⁷⁰ See Scott, *Historian*, 45-47.

view of spiritual truth.¹⁷¹ Instead, Anglo-Catholicism had generally embraced what he called a 'free Catholicism' which reduced the discovery of truth to 'ideas' and 'experiences' through the 'worshipping community.'¹⁷² In the light of the Liberal theological direction of Anglo-Catholicism, Dawson continued:

This has remained the weak spot in the later development of the Movement, and it explains the intrusion of an intellectual element that is entirely incongruous with its original spirit. Nevertheless, it is difficult to see how such an element can be permanently incorporated with the Anglo-Catholic tradition. One of them must ultimately expel the other. Either the existence of the Tractarian tradition will provide the basis for a return to Catholic intellectual principles, or the Movement will become so penetrated by Modernist elements that it will no longer possess any fundamental opposition to Liberal Protestantism and will ultimately tend to coalesce with it in the amorphous unity of a creedless undenominationalism.¹⁷³

It is clear from this quotation that Dawson held a high level of affinity with Newman who had written that 'there were but two paths – the way of faith and the way of unbelief, the latter ... through the half-way house of Liberalism to Atheism, the former ... through the half-way house of Anglicanism to Catholicism.'¹⁷⁴ If this were true on the personal level it was especially true at the corporate level, as the Movement within late nineteenth, and early twentieth-century, Protestantism and Anglo-Catholicism, as a general rule, tended to embrace religious principles which were essentially 'anti-supernatural' in creed. In other words, their rejection of truth as found in tradition and divine authority left them open to the divisive, and

¹⁷¹ *SOM*, 121.

¹⁷² Here Dawson is quoting the former Dean of Exeter, Dr. Mathews in his article in the Anglo-Catholic periodical *The Green Quarterly* (1933): 71. Although, as Dawson noted, the Dean was not an Anglo-Catholic himself, 'there is a good deal in modern Anglo-Catholic literature which justifies his statements.' *SOM*, 121.

¹⁷³ *SOM*, 124.

¹⁷⁴ John Henry Newman, *Essays on Development of Christian Doctrine* (London, 1845).

ultimately destructive, secular forces of Liberalism. Consistent with his argument in *Progress and Religion*, Dawson remarked:

To-day, when Liberalism is a spent force, when hardly anyone believes in Progress, and when modern civilization seems self-dedicated to destruction, we find the heirs of the Oxford Movement (or some of them at least) surrendering their post to an enemy that is in full retreat.¹⁷⁵

Not surprisingly, the book ends with an apologetic challenge. Quoting several passages from *Tracts for the Times*, Dawson attempted to continue the Movement's counter-cultural spirit.¹⁷⁶ 'The apocalyptic spirit,' he concluded,

underlies all the teaching of the early Tractarians and of all the features of the Movement it is probably the one that it is hardest for the modern reader to understand or to sympathize with. Nevertheless, it is one of the authentic notes of historic Christianity, and, if we ignore it, we shall find it impossible to understand not only the spirit of the Oxford Movement but the spirit of the New Testament itself.¹⁷⁷

For Dawson, the Oxford Movement represented a watershed in the history of Christianity in modern Britain. The tremors created by the conversion of Newman, among others, would continue to shake the foundation of the established Church for generations to come. In Dawson's view, however, the true essence of the movement lasted only for a generation after the departure of the intellect and faith of Newman and Froude. Yet the movement was testament to how 'authentic' Christian principles can shape the society for, as Dawson suggested, 'the change in the spirit of political Liberalism itself and its loss of the narrowly anticlerical tone that marked its earlier phase, may have been, in some measure, due to the influence

¹⁷⁵ *SOM*, 125.

¹⁷⁶ The four excerpts quoted by Dawson are from *Tract 85*. For some insight into the force of his challenge at the end of the book, the final page concludes with the biblical text 'What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate ... lest you be workers together with God's enemies, and be opening the way for the Man of sin, the son of perdition.' See *SOM*, 125-126.

¹⁷⁷ *SOM*, 126.

of the Oxford Movement, as represented by such men as Gladstone.¹⁷⁸ But it not only influenced English political life but also influenced the Christian community by 'reviv[ing] the study of positive theology' in the Church of England.¹⁷⁹ Thus the Movement provided leaven in every area of the political and ecclesiastical life of England.

There can be little doubt that the Catholic revival of the 1930s drew inspiration from the anti-liberal stand of their forefathers of the Oxford Movement. Newman and the Tractarian tradition in general, as was seen in the first chapter, was instrumental in Dawson's conversion and 'calling.' It was, then, the Tractarian's ability to recognize the inherent dangers of liberalism and vague ideals of secular humanism that continued to inspire Dawson and his contemporaries in their own struggle against modernity. For, as Reyes has noted,

Dawson understood liberalism in the same way that Newman did. That is, whatever its political goals and rhetoric, it was in essence a creed designed to destroy the Christian religion. It was at heart a new religion, a social idealism with real emotional power that turned men away from the transcendent by promising them earthly fulfilment. It made truth something that was unfolding in the progressive development of society and so denied the content of Christian revelation.¹⁸⁰

In spite of the similarities between Newman and Dawson, the dangers posed by the liberalism of the nineteenth century were not entirely those of the twentieth. Indeed, the chaotic episodes of the twentieth century had radically changed the means by which liberal ideals could be achieved. Replacing the liberalism of Locke and Mill was a quasi-liberalism devoid of social optimism and economic certainty, one that was ultimately dependent on radical intervention by the state if the momentum was to be continued. It was these differences that made

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁷⁹ See Christopher Dawson, 'The Catholic Revival in England', 1960.

¹⁸⁰ Reyes, 104.

Dawson's contention with liberalism distinct from Newman's.¹⁸¹ Dawson, for example, believed that liberalism was a 'spent force' and even though it still influenced to some degree the decisions of democratic nations, it had ceased to be an issue in the future political life of Europe.

Yet the similarities remain between the two men, and the vacuum left by the decline of liberalism between the two World Wars was interpreted by Dawson, as well as the majority of the intellectuals of the Catholic revival, as a consequence of the instability inherent in liberalism and the modern state; this was, in fact, the continual preoccupation of the leaders of the Oxford Movement. Clearly the one hundredth anniversary of the movement in 1933 evoked a spirit of revolution among Catholic intellectuals as the prophetic voices of Newman and Keble rang that much more clearly as the State was forced to adapt to the new economic conditions after the collapse of the Capitalist order. That the aftermath of the First World War created a movement of totalitarianism as a means to achieving social, political and economic ends is obvious. Dawson, however, as well as the majority of his Catholic contemporaries in the intellectual revival, saw totalitarianism as a broader political trend throughout Europe whether the political systems were fascist, socialist, or even democratic. In order to achieve social and economic stability, governments were also forced to take on the role of economic regulator.

At a personal level, *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement* provides valuable insight into Dawson's theological position as well as those issues with which he was most concerned throughout his career. The Oxford Movement, more than any other modern intellectual movement, was closest to his *cri de coeur*, for as

¹⁸¹ On Dawson's perspective, I would agree wholeheartedly with Jonathon Reyes who noted that 'evidently in this, he was mistaken.' Reyes, 105n.

Christina Scott had observed, writing about that era's events was where he 'felt closest to home.'¹⁸²

¹⁸²Scott, *Historian*, 116. As I discussed at greater length in chapter one, Scott's observations are obviously referring to the fact that Newman had influenced him greatly while he studied at Oxford.

Mediaeval Religion and other Essays (1934)

In 1933 Dawson received an invitation from Liverpool University to be Forwood Lecturer. The invitation requested that he give four lectures that were to discuss "Religion and Mediaeval Culture."¹⁸³ Sheed and Ward published the lectures in 1934 as *Mediaeval Religion and other Essays*.¹⁸⁴ Generally speaking, the book was a reiteration of the general message of *The Making of Europe*. Rather than concentrating specifically on the idea of Europe, however, Dawson singled out the intellectual debt the Renaissance and modern period owed to the medieval ethos. For, as he introduced the book, "[Christian intellectual and moral standards] have helped to make us what we are, whether for good or for evil, and even those who know and care nothing about mediaeval religion and culture are themselves

¹⁸³ *MR*, v.

¹⁸⁴ The book also included articles published in the couple of years preceding his publication of *Mediaeval Religion*. See Christopher Dawson, 'William Langland: The Vision of Piers Plowman' in Maisie Ward (ed.) *The English Way: Studies in English Sanctity from St. Bede to Newman* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1933) and Christopher Dawson, 'The Origins of the Romantic Tradition', *Criterion*, no. 11 (January 1932): 222-248. Reviews of *Mediaeval Religion and Other Essays* include: C.A.J. Armstrong, *Blackfriars*, 15 (1934): 867-68; John Bannon, *America*, 52 (1934): 115; G.G. Coulton, *Cambridge Review*, 56 (26 October 1934): 48; G.R. Elliott, *American Review*, 4 (1935): 361-366; David A. Elms, *Commonweal*, 21 (1935): 492; James Geary S.J., *Thought*, 11 (1936): 516-517; Adrian Morey, *Colosseum*, 2 (March, 1935): 59-60; Francis A. Walsh, O.S.B., *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, 35 (1935): 445-447; C.L. Waring, *Clergy Review*, 8 (1934): 495-497. Reviews that are initialled only include: B.L.C., *Catholic World*, 147 (1938): 627-629; J.F.O'D., *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 44 (1934): 553-555; A.G. *Studies*, 23 (1934): 530-531; N.W.P. *Downside Review*, 53 (1935): 117-118. Reviews that are unsigned include: *Modern Schoolman*, 12 (May, 1935): 97; *Month*, 165 (1935): 273-274; *Pax*, 24 (1934): 220; *Sign*, 14 (1934): 315; *TLS*, 6 September 1934, 596.

the unconscious heirs of mediaeval traditions.”¹⁸⁵ Cultural and intellectual expansion must be seen as organic in nature and inseparable from the processes of time and interaction that led to their later and, indeed, continuing development. Once again, as in *The Making of Europe*, Dawson was addressing the modern period’s revolt against history as he re-evaluated long-held distinctions between the medieval and renaissance periods.

Renaissance humanists, as well as those who have studied them, believed that they had successfully thrown off the melancholic and mystifying medieval perspective in favour of a more urbane and reasonable classical outlook. Dawson believed that it had been impossible for Renaissance humanists to remove themselves from the religious tradition that was instrumental to their own intellectual development. The flow of time carried with it the culture of the medieval era into the Renaissance, creating a blend of classical and medieval culture essential to the modern ethos, for, as Dawson maintained “[the] break with the past was far less complete than the [humanists] believed.” He expanded this contention as follows:

The Reformers and their successors the Puritans were not early Christians but post-mediaeval men who had a great deal in common with their immediate ancestors, while in the case of the Renaissance it is becoming increasingly clear that the new thought of the new age, whether it be the philosophy of Descartes, the science of Copernicus, the drama of Shakespeare, or the poetry of Spenser, has far closer links with the mediaeval past than their makers or themselves realized.¹⁸⁶

Clearly, the purpose of *Mediaeval Religion* was to demonstrate that a society could not attempt a complete break from its intellectual heritage, no matter how much it might despise that heritage. Instead, it must consider the complete philosophical development and historical tradition from which it originated. Such was the

¹⁸⁵ *MR*, 3.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

premise of the book and one which Dawson believed was long overdue in order to revise what Bertrand Russell called the modern period's "parochialism in time."¹⁸⁷

The final chapter of the book, and arguably the most important, was an exegetical analysis of William Langland's classic poem *Piers Plowman*.

Throughout the chapter Dawson compared and contrasted Langland with Chaucer, both of whom he argued represented various classic examples of the reactions in the new age emerging from the literary schools of the Renaissance of southern Europe. For Dawson, the poems of Langland are quintessential examples of the *sub specie aeternitatis* that he believed was so deeply entrenched in the medieval outlook. In contrast to the idealism of Chaucer, who "took the world as he found it, and found it good," Langland "judged the world and found it [*sic*] wanting."¹⁸⁸

Although the poets were medieval contemporaries, their respective approaches to literature differed tremendously. Not surprisingly, in the spirit that emerged from the Renaissance, Chaucer became a giant of English literature and history while Langland has "never received the attention that he deserves."¹⁸⁹

Dawson believed there was a close resemblance between Langland and Dante. "For Dante, no less than Langland," he wrote, "conceived his task in a prophetic spirit and used the convention of the vision to convey his criticism of life and his religious ideal. Both of them felt that the world had gone astray, and themselves with it: both had an intense faith in the Catholic way and yet were profoundly dissatisfied with the state of the Church and convinced of the need for a drastic reform."¹⁹⁰ Just as social reform was desperately needed in Langland's era,

¹⁸⁷ Bertrand Russell quoted in *ME*, 16.

¹⁸⁸ *MR*, 161.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

so too was it needed in 1933. Yet, it was not in the empty promises of a socio-economic utopia as found in modern socialism that the remedy was to be found, but rather in “spiritual renewal”; this could be accomplished by bringing religion and culture into a proper relationship once again.¹⁹¹

Clearly, Dawson admired Langland’s call for a drastic reformation of both Church and State.¹⁹² In fact, he believed that Langland, more than anyone in English literature, had come closest to the social and political ideals of Christian democracy as recorded by Leo XIII in his encyclical *Graves de Communi* in 1901.¹⁹³ Dawson could have had this encyclical in mind when he wrote,

Langland is in fact thoroughly English in the way in which he combines an intense class-consciousness and a hatred of social injustice with a strong conservatism and a respect for the established order. On the other hand, he is no leveller. He holds kingship and knighthood in high honour, and accepts the traditional Christian ideal of society as a hierarchical order that has its pattern in heaven.¹⁹⁴

By 1934, Dawson had begun to develop a detailed response to new political ideologies that were beginning to spread throughout Europe. As was suggested by his analysis of Sufism and Islamic Theocracy in *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* and *Piers Plowman* in *Mediaeval Religion*, Dawson’s political philosophy was shaped by the social encyclicals, especially those of the nineteenth century. Yet, it is a great irony in this eventful five- year period of Dawson’s career that one of Langland’s characteristics that Dawson admired most – the poet’s desire to bring “religion out of the palace and the pulpit into direct contact with common humanity” – was a principle that was virtually non-existent among Catholic

¹⁹¹Quinn, ‘Catholic Idea of History’, 81-82.

¹⁹²MR, 181.

¹⁹³*Ibid.*, 184.

¹⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 183.

intellectuals of the 1930s.¹⁹⁵ Such ambitions may have been widely discussed among Dawson and his contemporaries as a result of the emphasis placed on social action in the encyclicals, but in retrospect there is little evidence that they attempted to create programmes for social action.

The five years between 1930 and 1934 clearly saw the convergence of Dawson's vision for Christian culture in the West with the leadership of key members of the Catholic intellectual revival and ultimately brought him out of the seclusion of Devon into the fast paced world of London's salons and academic elite. In spite of his success and new-found fame, he was still not prepared to embrace the urban environment of London, as he had returned with his family to Hartlington in Yorkshire after the death of his parents in 1933. According to Scott, Dawson was anxious for the "intellectual isolation" that Hartlington was able to provide.¹⁹⁶ Such was the contradiction between his ever-increasing public life and his intense desire to distance himself from it.

In spite of his shyness, Dawson was much admired, especially for his thesis in *The Making of Europe* which argued for the centrality of medieval theology and philosophy to European cultural and political institutions and values. To a generation of Catholics who were critical of the modern state as well as modernity in general, his unique interpretation of the Oxford Movement as a brilliant, yet brief, reaction to the Erastian modern state and a challenge for a return to the authority of the Apostolic Church became a Catholic manifesto in an age of increasing disunity throughout Europe. In his sophistication and literary ability, Dawson's achievements paralleled those of Newman himself, and these similarities did not go unnoticed by its readers. The publication of *Enquiries into Religion and*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁹⁶ Scott, *Historian*, 111.

Culture and Medieval Religion in 1933 and 1934 respectively was a reminder that behind Dawson's polemics was solid and academically responsible scholarship that went beyond the often narrow scope of apologetics. By 1934, then, members of the Catholic intellectual revival as well as many non-Catholics were hailing Dawson as the first of English Catholic scholars.

Indeed, as Chesterton and his pioneering generation aged and gave way to the following, the task of communicating Catholic ideals to the people of England was seen to be secure with Dawson. Yet as the old was replaced by the new, so too was the world becoming vastly different from that of the earlier generation. Essentially, Dawson's emphasis on the need to return to the principles of a Christian model for European unity, while highly acclaimed, was found wanting as more specific answers to the political and economic problems of the time were demanded by his publishers. Since Catholicism on the continent, and more specifically in Italy, was directly involved in politics, Dawson was asked by his publishers to be more direct in his approach and analysis of the Church's response to political ideologies. It was a move by his publishers that steered the next four years of his career, for good or for ill.

Part Four

Commentator on Politics 1934-1939

English Catholics and Politics in the Early Twentieth Century

Most historians never achieve a popular appeal. The exception of Dawson to this rule speaks volumes about the way in which his growing audience perceived him and his historiography, during his lifetime. Although widely acclaimed throughout England and the United States as an historian, his works, as expressed by one writer, reflected 'the spirit of a reformer.'¹ This proved to be attractive to more politically inclined readers who could very easily find references to communism, industrialism, and liberalism blended into his historiography. Many of his views on society and politics were rooted in the social teachings of the papal encyclicals. The late nineteenth century – the era which arguably saw the most important papal social teachings – was an age which caused Lord Harcourt to declare in 1889 that 'we are all socialists now,' in spite of the wide variety of ideologies and political philosophies.² Of course Harcourt's observation was not to be taken literally. Rather it summarized the growing disenchantment with the greed and social polarization created by capitalism, and highlighted the subsequent attempt by all parties, whether liberal or conservative, to remedy the inequalities

¹Reyes, 25.

²Lord Harcourt quoted in Roland N. Stromberg, *European Intellectual History Since 1789*, 6th ed. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994), 160.

that the economic order was perpetuating. Although adherents of all ideologies were attempting to reform their economic policies through a variety of methods, the socialists and their powerful message of revolution or reform dominated the age in militant forms such as Marxism and more congenial movements such as Fabianism. Into this growing tension in the conflict between capitalism and socialism, the Catholic Church and its leader, Pope Leo XIII, interjected with a forceful statement of their own in 1891: the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.

Rerum Novarum was as brilliant as it was timely. Pope Leo XIII's challenge to Catholics to create social organizations and to work within the political life of their nation in order to bring about a more humane economic system throughout Europe was adopted by Catholics everywhere. The encyclical proved to be highly effective, creating a viable alternative to the socialist teaching that revolution was necessary. Martin Conway has noted that in the years that followed *Rerum Novarum*, Catholics not only became active in the political life of their nations but also became highly effective in the role as well: 'Catholic political parties and movements,' Conway concluded, 'have been among the most successful in Europe during the twentieth century, flourishing in a wide variety of national and political contexts.'³ Spurred on by the challenges of Pope Leo XIII, Catholics in Germany, Portugal, Austria, and Italy formed political parties to promote Catholic social values in the economic programmes of their nations.

The success of *Rerum Novarum* provided an impetus for more teachings on the economic order, liberalism, and socialism and the appropriate response to each. *Ubi Arcano Dei* (1922), an encyclical of Pope Pius XI, challenged Catholics to become actively involved in the work of spreading and reviving the Kingdom of

³ Martin Conway, Introduction to Tom Buchanan and Martin Conway (eds.), *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918-1965* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 1.

Christ. Almost immediately following the publication of *Ubi Arcano Dei*, Catholic involvement in the political life of the nations surged once again, as evidenced in the highly successful movement called 'Catholic Action,' a 'centralised, Rome-inspired, hierarchically-controlled, model for the mobilisation of the laity.'⁵ More specifically, Catholic Action encouraged Catholic workers throughout Europe to form groups whereby they could push for the implementation of the social ideals of the encyclicals in the economic life in the nations in which they lived and worked. Through these means, the Church hoped to re-implement Christian ideals into the social and political life of European nations, all of which, for centuries, had nearly completely ignored the religious origins of their culture.⁶

While English Catholics did attempt to promote Catholic social ideals in their own country, they clearly did not have the same success as the majority of Catholics in other countries throughout Europe, and 'Catholic Action' in the European sense did not exist.⁷ In fact, most historians who have studied twentieth-century English Catholicism have highlighted the absence of a unified political vision among Catholics. One historian of English Catholicism has recently noted: 'There is a surprising extent of agreement among historians writing over the whole

⁵ Adrian Hastings, 'Some Reflexions on the English Catholicism of the late 1930s' in Garrett Sweeney (ed.) *Bishops and Writers* (Wheathampstead: Anthony Clarke, 1977), 114.

⁶ James Pereiro, 'Who are the Laity?' in McClelland and Hodgetts (eds.) *From without the Flaminian Gate* (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1999); 173.

⁷ Besides the afore-mentioned articles by Hastings and Periero, information for this section was taken from Tom Buchanan and Martin Conway (eds.) *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918-1965* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); Sheridan Gilley, 'Years of Equipose, 1892-1942', in V. Alan McClelland and Michael Hodgetts (eds.), *From Without the Flaminian Gate* (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1999); Peter C. Kent and John F. Pollard (eds.) *Papal Diplomacy in the Modern Age* (London: Praegar, 1994); Jeffrey Paul von Arx, 'Catholics and Politics' in McClelland and Hodgetts (eds.) *From without the Flaminian Gate* (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1999); David Mathew, *Catholicism in England 1535-1935* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936), 251-259; Joan Keating, 'Discrediting the 'Catholic State': British Catholics and the Fall of France' in Frank Tallett and Nicholas Atkin (eds.) *Catholicism in Britain and France Since 1789* (London: Hambledon Press, 1996); Thomas Moloney, *Westminster, Whitehall and the Vatican: The Role of Cardinal Hinsley 1935-1943* (London, 1985).

range of this period, at different times, and from different points of view that there is not much that can be said about Catholics in politics; that Catholics counted for little in British politics; and that their involvement in politics was ineffectual at best, counter-productive at worst.⁸ Thus what most historians of English Catholicism note about this period is the absence of any organized political mobilization on the part of the laity or the hierarchy. There are several reasons – all of which are in some way related – for the lack of effort towards such ends. The first and most obvious reason is the fact that Catholics in England were a relatively small minority in numbers and in significance. With only a few exceptions, not since the Reformation had there been a substantial Catholic infrastructure such as universities and colleges. Thus, numerically and culturally, they lacked the critical mass to be taken seriously as an influential body in the political life of England. The second reason was the inability and general lack of initiative to form a Catholic political party as Catholics in Germany and Austria had done.⁹ Whether or not this is a direct result of their minority position is unclear, but the absence of such a political party made the cause of political action much more difficult for English Catholics.

A third reason is a general lack of unity among the Catholic community in England. In his consideration of the political affairs of English Catholics, Adrian Hastings has noted that English Catholicism suffered from a 'social split' between a small upper class elite and a large, working class majority made up primarily of Irish immigrants.¹⁰ The social split, he believed, was partly responsible for the lack

⁸Jeffrey Paul Von Arx, 'Catholics and Politics', in V. Alan McClelland and Michael Hodgetts (eds.), *From Without the Flaminian Gates* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999), 245.

⁹See Gilley, 44.

¹⁰Hastings, 108.

of a unified political vision for common action. The majority of upper class Catholics were conservative 'with a small c', while the majority of the working class supported first the Liberals, and later Labour.¹¹ The tendency for Catholics in England to be able to promote their social ideas through the Labour party has much to do with the relatively peaceful nature of the party. Indeed, in comparison to Bolshevism in the Soviet Union, most Britons accepted the leftist leanings of the Labour party in England as an acceptable cousin to socialism with little or no threat to democracy or the capitalist order.

The absence of a unified Catholic voice in the political life of England does not necessarily mean that they were apolitical. This is Jeffrey Paul von Arx's thesis in an essay published recently, in which he attempted to provide revision for what he understood to be an unfair judgment of English Catholics and their contribution to politics in England. Von Arx rightfully argues that the predominating view of Catholic politics has been tainted by too many historians using a faulty measure as a standard for judgement.¹² His contention with most of the historiography of the period is that each survey uses the model of 'Catholic Action' as a standard by which to judge the effectiveness of British Catholics in their promotion of Catholic social teachings. Alternatively he proposes that a different model than 'Catholic Action' needs to be used – one that considers the teaching of the hierarchy in the nineteenth-century that shaped future Catholic involvement in politics into the twentieth century. 'From the time of Wiseman to the time of Heenan and beyond,' Von Arx wrote, 'it has been the policy of leaders of the Catholic community – and

¹¹For more on the move of Catholics from Liberal to Labour, see Buchanan, 'Great Britain', 262-263. Buchanan noted that the Labour party was only accepted by the hierarchy after a 'prolonged debate' as to whether or not it was acceptable in the light of Catholicism's opposition to socialism dating back to *Rerum Novarum*.

¹²Hastings, 108.

especially of Cardinal Manning, who, having the most opportunity to do so, really set the pattern in these matters – to engage Roman Catholics in British politics, but not as a group apart from or over against existing politics.’ Von Arx concludes by making the astute observation that ‘their object was to encourage Roman Catholics to become directly involved in democratic political life through existing parties.’¹³ The greatest contribution Catholics in England did bring to British political life was a ‘particular view of social questions, commitment to a vision of the common good and a willingness to collaborate within the existing political forms with others of different or no religious affiliation to achieve that good.’¹⁴

As a very small minority within a minority, members of the English Catholic intellectual revival sought to influence their peers through what Hastings called their ‘theology of culture,’ an academic approach involving lively discussion and debate in journals, newspapers and books.¹⁵ This Catholic intelligentsia ‘gave great thought to the social and political implications of their faith.’¹⁶ This, however, largely confined Catholic political activity to the sphere of intellectual activity, and separated it from the practical politics of Catholic labour voters. In comparison with the majority of rank and file Catholics in England, then, the political perspectives of Catholic intellectuals were much more diverse and, indeed, flamboyant. The most influential Catholics among these intellectuals were Chesterton and Belloc, both of whom were instrumental in a movement called ‘distributism.’

¹³Von Arx, 249.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 264-265.

¹⁵Aidan Nichols, ‘Christopher Dawson’s Catholic Setting’ in John Morrill and Stratford Caldecott (eds.) *Eternity in Time* (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke, 1997).

¹⁶Keating, 27.

Distributism was a system of political economy in England, developed by intellectuals in the Distributist League such as Chesterton and Belloc, but also the Welsh artist and friend of Dawson, David Jones, Fr. Vincent McNabb, and the artist, Eric Gill. Frankly critical of both capitalism and state socialism, distributism promoted the ideal of a 'widespread distribution of property among many small producers.'¹⁷ Only through these means did they believe a *via media* could be found between two equally pernicious economic systems. While distributism never developed an organizational structure, the popularity of Chesterton and the controversy of Belloc ensured distributists an audience to whom they could preach their messages of needed government reforms.¹⁸ Although it received much of its form from *Rerum Novarum* and later from Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), Patrick Allitt has noted that it was not specifically inspired by the social encyclicals.¹⁹ Instead, much of the economic philosophy of the movement had been shaped by an attempt to curb the homogeneity of industrialism and the government's handling of domestic and foreign affairs such as the Boer War and the Irish Land Act (1903). Belloc's *The Servile State* (1913), the 'sacred text of distributism', had as its model the French peasantry. It challenged 'wage slavery' and promoted the ideal of peasant proprietorship as a means to 'restrain the aggressive centralizing state.'²⁰

Distributism, then, induced a tremendous fear of centrality in both economic and political systems. The ideals of the movement created some

¹⁷Stromberg, 161.

¹⁸ According to Stromberg, 'the wit and wisdom [of Chesterton and Belloc] gained them an audience.' Stromberg, 161.

¹⁹ Allitt, 206. See also Dermot Quinn, 'Distributism as a Movement and Ideal,' *Chesterton Review*, 19 (May 1993): 165.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 207. Gilley, 43.

practically minded solutions such as Gill's community at Ditchling, a short-lived enterprise that eventually folded because of disunity among its members. The attempt by its leaders to make distributism a popular movement was continually hindered by disputations and ideological differences among Catholics as well as the movement's vulnerability to misunderstanding by outsiders, especially in the 1930s as political tensions rose throughout Europe.

Nowhere were the ideological differences among Catholics clearer than in the variety of opinions about industry. In the 1930s distributists and other Catholic social organizations in England faced divisions when Henry Somerville, a leading figure in another, less aggressive Catholic social organization, the Catholic Social Guild, criticized the distributists for their continual condemnation of industrialism as 'the work of the devil.'²¹ Distributists also faced a setback when Cardinal Bourne, who cautiously accepted the Labour party and distinguished its reforms from continental socialism, unexpectedly supported the government in the general strike of 1926, an act that 'seemed to fly in the face of the papal encyclical's social teachings.'²² All of these setbacks began to take their toll, and by the 1930s, many distributists began to feel the allure of more concrete political expressions. This was especially true for the Communists 'because of their success in inspiring youthful enthusiasm and idealism which [their] own church could not seem to match.'²³ Inability to agree upon fundamental issues such as these made it increasingly difficult for English Catholics to speak with a unified voice, and if the distributist movement created little more than a ripple in England, then the

²¹ From an article by Henry Somerville in the *Catholic Times*, 22 April 1927 quoted in Buchanan, 'Great Britain', 260.

²² Allitt, 210.

²³ Sparr, 67; Allitt, 209.

Catholic Social Guild was surely not a force to be reckoned with as it could only boast 3910 members at its peak in 1939.²⁴ From this perspective, Tom Buchanan's observation that distributism was 'the closest approximation to a specifically political Catholic movement in twentieth-century Britain' further reveals the difficulty faced by Catholics in any effort towards a unified political movement.²⁵

The promises of Italian Fascism as not only a solution to capitalism but also one compatible with the social teachings of the encyclicals lured many English Catholics to look south to Italy rather than to the marginalised distributist movement. The fact that many Catholic intellectuals were already openly critical of the marriage of liberalism and industrialism, going as far as to criticize democracy as the ideologies' illegitimate child, made Fascism even more alluring. A significant number of English Catholics saw Mussolini and Italy as models of leadership and society compatible with Catholic principles of authority. Even the distributist Hilaire Belloc had 'settled ... for the dream of some sort of righteous populous dictatorship.'²⁶ Catholic journals such as *The Tablet* were famous for printing essays written by Catholics eager to establish a fascist government in England. The number of Catholic sympathizers to fascism was obvious in England as it was a well known fact throughout England that Sir Oswald Moseley, the leader of the British Union of Fascists – or 'Brown Shirts' – looked to young Catholics as new recruits, believing Catholicism to be a possible fifth column to fascism.²⁷ Catholic organizations such as the Catholic Evidence Guild, however, as

²⁴Periero, 175.

²⁵Tom Buchanan, 'Great Britain' in Buchanan and Conway (eds.), *Political Catholicism*, 259.

²⁶Hastings, 118.

²⁷Moloney, 55-60.

well as Catholic journals and newspapers, attempted to avoid accusations of being too open to fascism by purging its publications of anything which might suggest it.²⁸ Clearly, the perspectives of English Catholics concerning politics was anything but uniform.

By 1934, the complexity of Europe's political future was becoming more and more threatening to the fragile peace of the early 1920s. The growing success of fascism in Italy and totalitarianism throughout Europe in general exposed the struggles of democracy and capitalism to re-establish the former stability and success of the old economic order. For English Catholics, the complexity of the new political ideologies and Rome's reaction to them as well as the failures of distributism to amount to anything intensified the need for a genuine Catholic response to the political divisions.²⁹

It was these complexities that led Dawson's editors and publishers, as well as organizations such as the BBC, to ask him to provide insights about current political events. Seeing it as a natural extension of his apologetic mission, Dawson accepted the task, thereby shelving his history of culture for a brief period of time.³⁰ Yet Scott's assertion that 1934 'saw the end of one line of Christopher Dawson's thought, that of his historical and particularly medieval studies, and the beginning of his writing as an interpreter of political situations arising through the new ideologies' is possibly misleading.³¹ Contemporary politics, especially as related to economics and the nature of the State, were always important to

²⁸Hastings, 115.

²⁹Scott, *Historian*, 122.

³⁰Scott implied that the shift in attention occurred because he was 'pressed by publishers, editors and the BBC to contribute his views.' (p. 122)

³¹Scott, *Historian*, 120.

Dawson, and he provided his own insights whenever the article and book allowed for it.³² Before 1934, however, his analysis of contemporary political issues was both sporadic and superficial, and had not been achieved as comprehensively as they would be before and during the Second World War. His decision to concentrate on current events was a much more important one than he knew at the time, however, as he never again returned to his project outlining the history of world culture, leaving it only partially complete at his death in 1970.³³

³²For one of the most extensive, yet relatively small examples, see 'European Democracy and the New Economic Forces', *The Sociological Review*, no. 22 (1930): 32-42.

³³See Alexander Murray, Introduction to *The Making of Europe* (1932;), xiv.

'The Church and the Dictators' (1934)

In the spring of 1934, Dawson was asked by the editor of the *Catholic Times* to examine the relationship between the Church and Fascist political ideology in a series entitled 'The Church and the Dictators.' The first article examined the emergence of Fascism in Europe, the second examined Catholic social teaching as stated by Pope Leo XIII, the third discussed the central ideas behind the Totalitarian State, and the fourth and final essay discussed how these themes related to England as a nation.³⁴

Echoing his convictions in the introduction to *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* – that some form of social readjustment or reordering was needed in Europe – Dawson argued the following in the third article:

A Europe divided among 24 nations each determined to decrease its imports and to increase its armaments cannot survive. What we need is not a suicidal nationalism that ignores the spiritual community of civilization, nor a cosmopolitanism which ignores historic realities but a European order. Some form of European organization is necessary, and we can only attain it if we return to the old tradition of Christian Europe and recognise a higher spiritual loyalty than that of blood or class.

The method for this to be achieved was through the social and economic philosophy of corporatism. With the social teachings of the social encyclicals in mind, Dawson believed that corporatism was the closest system to these 'historic

³⁴ Scott, *Historian*, 122.

realities' and could create order throughout Europe by subduing the revolutionary elements of Socialism and providing an answer to the inequalities created by unrestricted capitalism. In spite of the political chaos associated with the rise of totalitarianism and dictatorships, Dawson spoke optimistically of the possibilities for the development of corporatism in Europe to fill the void left by the failure of liberalism and the capitalist order. However, Dawson's use of the term corporatism proved to be highly controversial given the use of the corporate ideals by Italian Fascism. Still, the editor of *The Catholic Times* hoped that the series would 'generate discussion' and he certainly was 'not disappointed.'³⁵

In the weeks following the final article in the series, *The Catholic Times* published a steady stream of letters responding to the articles. To the praise of some and the criticism of others, Dawson's analysis of corporate ideals and the possibility for fascism as a political structure for such an economic philosophy had given the impression that he was indeed sympathetic to the claims of fascism. After extolling Dawson's articles, D. F. Sander wrote that British fascism is 'Fascism in an ideal form ... which in its beauty of action is ... similar to that of the fine old mediaeval guilds.'³⁶ Sander's hope for the fulfilment of Catholic social ideals in a British Fascist State was clear: 'When British fascists get into power in this declining country ... we Catholics particularly will be amply compensated, if only by the equal justice which our schools will then receive with those that are national.'³⁷ Not all the responses were so favourable. Joseph Gallagher, who believed Dawson was ill-informed about Fascism, complained that 'it is with considerable surprise and anxiety that I find certain misinformed people writing to

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 122-123.

³⁶ D. F. Sander in *The Catholic Times*, ? May 1934.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

your valuable newspaper on Fascism. May I remind Mr. Dawson that a Fascist Corporate State does not exist yet in Italy.³⁸ In what was arguably the most openly critical letter written in opposition to Dawson's political views, Edwin Greenwood claimed that,

in spite of Mr. Christopher Dawson's able plea for a Corporate State, I and many others regard the whole proposition with considerable uneasiness. Can the Corporate State logically avoid persecution and cruel coercion? I think not. Neither the example of the Continent nor the somewhat childish pronouncements of our own Fascists are encouraging to Catholics. Mr. Dawson admits all this and yet toys most dangerously with a dangerous and disruptive political doctrine.³⁹

Greenwood's observations reveal the consistent tendency early in these debates to make corporatism synonymous with fascism. Even Dawson created confusion among his readers by failing to properly distinguish between the two.⁴⁰ In spite of his affinity with corporate ideals, Dawson sparred with the readers who were quick to place him in the fascist mould. In response to these charges he wrote,

Finally, I would say that I object to being called a fascist because it is apt to make people suppose that I am a follower of Mr Oswald Moseley or some such leader; if, however, the word is used to mean someone who has awoken to the fact that Mr. Gladstone is dead, then, of course, I have no objection to being described as one.⁴¹

Dawson's casual use of the term 'fascist' reveals an ambiguity in his terminology and an arrogant carelessness. His inability to attain an adequate definition of fascism was a perpetual problem in his commentary until the onset of the Second

³⁸ Joseph Gallagher in *The Catholic Times*, 11 May 1934.

³⁹ Edwin Greenwood in *The Catholic Times*, ? May 1934.

⁴⁰ The differences between the Corporate State and Fascism, and especially between the Corporate ideals of the nineteenth-century encyclicals and Fascist Corporativism will become clearer in the debate between the editor of the *Catholic Herald* and Dawson during the months of August and September in 1935. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁴¹ Dawson quoted in Scott, 123-124.

World War, at which time its meaning became noticeably clearer. In the meantime, however, if Dawson wanted to at least avoid the description 'fascist,' an article published in 1934 for *The Catholic Times* was detrimental to that goal. This article was written by a reporter who attended a lecture given by Dawson at the University of Liverpool and recorded that 'Dawson thought there was no doubt that the English would turn to Fascism, but it would have to be something very different from that on the Continent.'⁴² The revolutionary quality of the lecture was expressed in his exhortation to the students that 'what we need is not a new State machine but new men and new leadership.'⁴³

The confusion that revolved around the articles in *The Catholic Times* revealed both the confusion and a lack of unity among Catholic intellectuals concerning a genuinely Catholic response to recent developments in European politics. An important aspiration of the intellectual revival was to provide a model for unity through intellectual discourse on contemporary issues. As the political and economic tension rose throughout Europe with the increased strength of Fascism and the threat of civil war in Spain, the lack of clarity among Catholics in England regarding the ongoing debate was becoming an obvious setback in their otherwise unified effort to 'baptise' the culture of England. Dawson's publisher recognized that further clarification was needed and looked once again to Dawson to provide it in a book. Dawson felt his publisher's requests were appropriate, as he was looking for an opportunity to continue writing on the controversial themes he had expressed the previous year.⁴⁴

⁴²*The Catholic Times*, 24 March 1934.

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴Dawson had to clarify many of his statements during this period. For an example, see 'Reflections on the Death of Mr. Gladstone: The Compromise' in the *Catholic Herald* January 5th, 1935. In this article, Dawson attempted to explain his earlier statements in the same newspaper.

Religion and the Modern State (1935)

In addition to his desire to clarify his former positions, Dawson's hope for *Religion and the Modern State* was twofold: to examine the nature of the nation-state in the twentieth century, and to provide analysis concerning how Catholic social teachings – especially those of the late nineteenth-century encyclicals – could be a means to protect civil liberties in the face of recent developments not only in Communist and Fascist nations but in Democracies as well.⁴⁵ In terms of his thesis, the book is one of Dawson's most difficult to decipher. Those who reviewed the book soon after its publication criticized it for its vague descriptions, irresponsible use of terms, and concepts that never progress beyond the abstract.⁴⁶

which insinuated the positive aspects surrounding the death of Gladstone and his era. *STUA*, box/folder 18/71.

⁴⁵ See for example Christopher Dawson, 'The New Leviathan', *The Dublin Review*, no. 185 (1929): 88-102 reprinted in Dawson, *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1933), 1-13.

⁴⁶ Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Modern State* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1935). Here after *RMS*. There were at least 20 reviews of the book completed during the months following its publication. They include: Oskar Bauhofer, *Blackfriars*, 16 (1935): 625-627; Charles Bruehl, *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, 36 (1936): 1000-1001; T. Charles-Edwards, *Downside Review*, 54 (1936): 77-83; T.E. Flynn, *Clergy Review*, 11 (1936): 296-304; C.J. Friedrich, *Commonweal*, 23 (1936): 612-613; John LaFarge, *America*, 54 (1935); Alfred Kasin, *Books*, 12 (15 March 1936): 19; John H. Mecklin, *American Sociological Review*, 1 (1936): 309-310; R.E. Roberts, *New Statesman and Nation*, 10 (1935): 168-170; Vida D. Scudder, *Living Church*, 94 (1936): 210; Mason Wade, *American Review*, 6 (1936): 347-357; H.G. Wood, *Spectator*, 155 (9 August 1935): 231; D.D. Zuver, *Churchman*, 150 (15 January 1936): 5. Some reviews contained only initials. S. J. G., *The Tablet*, 166 (17 August 1935): 202-203; J.M.O'S, *Studies*, 24 (1935): 515-517; J.McS, *Catholic World*, 142 (1936): 752-753. Unsigned reviews include *Ecclesiastical Review*, 95 (1936): 752-753; *Month*, 166 (1935): 273-274; *Sign*, 15 (1936): 508-509; *TLS*, (22 August, 1935): 520.

Later generations, including the present one, continue to misunderstand this book.⁴⁷ In spite of the book's opacity, the earnestness with which Dawson critiques modern political solutions and his attempt to provide alternative answers also makes it one of his most honest and personal projects. Indeed, as Dawson himself admitted in his introduction, the 'problems [had] become so insistent' that he wrote it 'almost against [his] own will.'⁴⁸

Continuing an important theme from his earlier books and articles, Dawson was convinced that in the decade following World War One, the West had entered a post-liberal age. Like many of his contemporaries, Dawson believed that the war had shaken the Western world's sense of security and superiority. These convictions were further substantiated by the economic collapse of the late 1920s. The combined political and economic collapses had dire consequences for the future of the democratic system, liberalism's political offspring.⁴⁹ 'The fact is,' he wrote, 'that the Parliamentary system as we know it in this country and still more on the Continent was the creation of the nineteenth century and is ultimately based on the philosophy of nineteenth-century Liberalism.' The decline of such a pervasive ideology as liberalism, he believed, made any future return to *laissez-faire* principles highly unlikely. The only alternative – one he believed was confirmed by recent legislation made by democratic nations – was a greater

⁴⁷The controversy continued after the war. In fact most of the secondary sources written during Dawson's lifetime, which directly or indirectly analysed his ideas of this period, concluded that he held at least some affinity with fascism. Generally speaking this was due to the failure on the part of scholars to consider the greater context provided by Dawson's earlier books and articles. In fairness, however, this was an understandable error that has been corrected with time due to increased research and scholarship that has been completed in recent years. It was only recently, with the advent of new scholarship that scholars of his life have attempted to place this period of his political commentary within the greater context of his career as an apologist. Too often, Dawson's reviewers have attempted to make sense of his political commentary without considering the sum of his earlier ideas.

⁴⁸*RMS*, viii.

⁴⁹Schlesinger, 154.

intrusion by the state into the economic life of the nation and, ultimately, the personal life of the individual. Dawson, like his distributist friends, believed that the Liberal values of freedom of religion, liberty of the individual, and even Democracy, then, were being undermined by the increased need to centralize state functions.

Recent developments in the United States legitimized these concerns. 'It is in the U.S.,' Dawson wrote, 'that the new phase in the development of the Western democracies – the attempt to assume political control of the economic situation – is to be seen in its most dramatic form. The advent of President Roosevelt has an obvious analogy with the rise of the new dictatorships in Europe. It is in fact a constitutional dictatorship, an attempt to find a solution of the national crisis.'⁵⁰ It is doubtful that the average person in the early 1930s would have seen it as such. For the majority of people struggling through the economic hardships created by the Great Depression, government intervention was believed to be the necessary course of action. For Dawson, however, the subtlety of such action was a pernicious development in the character of the nation state with potentially devastating consequences to human freedom, no matter what the political orientation of the particular state. 'It is obvious', he warned, 'that any such social control involves a firmer and more permanent organization of political power than was necessary under nineteenth-century conditions. If we abandon the system of free competition, free trade, and free prices, we shall also have to abandon political individualism and the right to criticize and oppose the Government.'⁵¹ Fascist and Socialist nations had already embraced this philosophy, and Dawson believed it was only a matter of time until Democracies would follow suit. Clearly, Dawson

⁵⁰ *RMS*, 23.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

was not alone in his observations concerning the new political conditions. Indeed, as was noted in the last chapter, a great number of intellectuals around him 'felt squeezed between the conflicting 'totalitarian' ideologies of German Nazism and Russian communism, as the democracies seemed helpless to cope with the economic ordeal.'⁵²

It was this pessimistic prediction about politics in a post-liberal age that further convinced Dawson of the rise of what he claimed would be totalitarian democracy: 'At the present time,' he proposed,

the old forms of individualism are everywhere passing away before the pressure of the modern State And this tendency is not confined to a single country or to any one particular political or social system. It may, I think, even be argued that Communism in Russia, National Socialism in Germany, and Capitalism and Liberal Democracy in the Western countries are really three forms of the same thing, and that they are all moving by different but parallel paths to the same goal, which is the mechanization of human life and the complete subordination of the individual to the state and the economic process.⁵³

Although Dawson affirmed in the lines that followed that they are not 'absolutely equivalent,' he believed that all were in one way or another a 'serious threat to spiritual freedom.'⁵⁴

Like Spengler, Dawson believed that liberal democracy was only a final phase in a relatively brief time span in the history of the West, a social condition based on liberal ideals that were changing under the totalitarian trends and affecting 'all the nations.'⁵⁵ Consequently, the nation-state of the future was

⁵² Stromberg, 222.

⁵³ *RMS*, xv.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, xv.

⁵⁵ It has been noted that Dawson's use of the term totalitarianism (and how it is to be understood within the context of the book) is too broad. While the two uses (the U. S. and the British examples) follow on one level, to most readers it was confusing to say the least. See Reyes, 122. When Jonathon Reyes was writing his dissertation he discussed this issue with Bruno Schlesinger. Both were in agreement that part of the confusion surrounding the book was Dawson's loose and often misguided use of the term. Reyes wrote, 'Schlesinger suspects that what Dawson

evolving into an vastly different political organization than the ones imagined not only by Plato and Aquinas but even different from the modern 'artificial structure' of Hobbes' *Leviathan* and the 'magistrate' of Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*. Dawson commented on this directly:

The old individualist ideal of the State as a policeman whose business it is to clear the field for individual initiative is a thing of the past. The State of the future will not be a policeman, but a nurse, and a schoolmaster and an employer and an officer – in short an earthly providence, an all-powerful, omnipotent god – and a very jealous god at that. We see one form of this ideal in Russia and another in Germany. It may be that we shall see yet a third in England and America.⁵⁶

The United States did not provide the only example. In Dawson's own country of England, the demise of the Liberal Party in conjunction with the ascension of the Labour Party demonstrated a radical shift in the traditional political structure of England. 'We must recognize that even in England,' Dawson remarked, 'parliamentarism has to face a serious crisis. The same forces that have brought about the downfall of parliamentarism and liberal democracy on the Continent are operating in this country, though here they are weaker, while the British constitution is tougher and more resilient.'⁵⁷ In spite of the resiliency of the British political system, Dawson believed the success of labour posed a serious threat to not only to parliamentary democracy but also to what remained of the British liberal spirit. Although Cardinal Bourne himself admitted in 1931 that 'very few members of the Labour party would base their desire for social reform on the principles which his Holiness has so rightly and so strongly condemned,' Dawson

meant by totalitarianism was simply state control of most of the cultural elements in a given society which is radically different from what Hitler's regime became.' Reyes, 'Christopher Dawson', 122n. See also Cushing, 'Cultural Morphology', 18 for further explanation of Dawson's tendency to confuse the two definitions.

⁵⁶ *RMS*, 106.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

felt that fundamental changes in the party's philosophy in the four years after Bourne's observation provided enough cause for concern.⁵⁸ 'Down to 1931,' Dawson wrote, 'English Socialism was able to adapt itself without much difficulty to the requirements of the party system. But the sudden and utter collapse of the Labour Party at the moment of crisis caused a sharp swing to the left among the faithful remnant of convinced Socialists. If the Labour Party was ever to return to office, it must return not in obedience to the mechanism of the English party system, but as a genuinely socialist party pledged to carry out an immediate and integral socialisation of the whole economic life of the nation.'⁵⁹ Concerning the threat Labour posed, Woolever observed that Dawson's fear was that if the trade unions rose to prominence,

a new principle would enter English political life, which if logically carried out would produce a totalitarian order Although paradoxically professing to adhere to constitutional methods in theory, Labour Party extremists regarded the destruction of the capitalist system as an absolute good which far outweighed all questions of constitutional procedure and parliamentary method. If Labour gained control, the English party system would come to an end, for all the workers in union would band together and with the T.U.C. decide the policy of parliamentary candidates.⁶⁰

In response to the political trends in the United States and Britain, Dawson once again attempted to outline a genuinely Catholic solution that looked beyond answers provided by abstract political and economic solutions.⁶¹ His affinity with

⁵⁸ Sidney Z. Ehler and John B. Morrill (eds.), *Church and State Through the Centuries: A Collection of Historic Documents with Commentaries* (London: Burns & Oates, 1954), 411. See also Gilley, *Equipose*, 44 for more on the Catholic response to the Labour Government after the publication of *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931.

⁵⁹ *RMS*, 27-28.

⁶⁰ Woolever, 'Christopher Dawson', 128. While Woolever's observation is an excellent summary of Dawson's fear of developments within Labour, it reveals the confusion that has surrounded Dawson's idea of the threat of totalitarianism. Woolever emphasized the political aspects of totalitarianism over the greater trends in all political forms, and therefore puts too much emphasis on this one facet of the totalitarian trend.

⁶¹ See Reyes, 'Renewal of Christian Culture', 122-124.

the ideals of nineteenth-century encyclicals had already made him extremely critical of ideologies. Charles Cushing, for example, noted that Dawson saw 'Liberal philosophy', and ultimately democracy, as 'incompatible with Catholic doctrine and with the deepest traditions of western culture. It denies the principle of authority in politics, makes the will of the majority the sovereign power in the state, rejects the moral law, and reduces society to a sum of autonomous individuals.'⁶² On the subject of the Church's rejection of egalitarianism in favour of a hierarchical society, Dawson suggested that 'the liberal democratic ideal of absolute equality ... ignores the very idea of status and regards society as a collection of identical units. But the result of this denial of status is not to make men really equal but only to leave them at the mercy of economic forces.[In the Democratic system, a] man is judged not by what he is but by what he has, and since the worker has nothing he has no real share in the Capitalist State.'⁶³ This does not mean, however, that Dawson was anti-democratic in principle, but rather that he, in affinity with Sorel and Tocqueville, believed Democracy to be fundamentally weak and vulnerable to social conditions which detracted from its claims as a guarantor of liberal principles. The essence of liberal democratic ideals, then, had to be protected in a political structure that was less connected to the economic ends of the State. In response to these observations, the last several chapters of the book are devoted to the 'Religious Solution' and 'Catholic Doctrine of the State' and are surely the most controversial statements of his career up to that point.⁶⁴ In these sections, Dawson attempted to explain to his contemporaries

⁶²Charles B. Cushing, 'Christopher Dawson's Cultural Morphology' (St. John's University: PhD dissertation, unpublished, 1971), 19. The encyclical *Quanta Cura*, for example, illustrates this position.

⁶³*RMS*, 134-135.

the challenging subject of the Catholic ideal of corporatism and the similarities and dissimilarities of this concept to the social programs of socialism and fascism.

Borrowing heavily from Popes Pius IX, Leo XIII, and Pius XI, Dawson attempted to illustrate the ideal relationship between the Church and State as outlined in the encyclicals *Quanta Cura*, *Rerum Novarum*, *Quod Apostolici Muneris*, and *Quadragesimo Anno*. According to Dawson, the Christian tradition has maintained two fundamental principles about this relationship: the first is 'the existence of transcendence – the idea of a supernatural order, a supernatural society and a supernatural End of History.' The second principle was that of 'dependence of human society and human law on the divine order ... to which all social and individual behaviour must conform and which rest in the last resort on the eternal Reason of God, the source and bond of the whole cosmic order.'⁶⁵ A unified political vision among Christians in the modern era did not exist in Dawson's opinion because their view of the State had not been informed by these fundamental principles of order. In spite of his general openness to other Christian communities, Dawson accused the Protestant Reformers of creating a dichotomous approach to politics that has too often 'fluctuated between two extremes, sometimes identifying religion and politics ... and at other times relegating religion entirely to the inner world of the individual conscience.'⁶⁶ Using Luther as an example of the latter, he observed that the tendency among sectarian Protestantism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to support political agendas based on their social creed was a conscious reaction to the rigid separation between

⁶⁴These are the titles of the last two chapters in the book. *RMS*, 115-128 and 129- 139 (respectively)

⁶⁵*RMS*, 129.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 130.

the temporal and the spiritual orders in the earliest years of the Reformation.⁶⁷

Obviously, Dawson believed it was only in the Catholic tradition that the two principles remained balanced, providing a model for a truly Christian response to current issues in modern politics.

Following Joseph de Maistre, Dawson lamented that the balance of the above principles in the pre-modern European social and political order had been compromised by the 'rationalist propaganda' of the Enlightenment.⁶⁸ The move away from the natural ordering of society to the vague liberal notions of democratic equality led to a social structure which promised freedom through increasing personal wealth, but instead of this liberty, the individual worker was reduced to a cog in the machinery of the capitalist order with little or no protection from the system itself. Like Edmund Burke before him, Dawson was critical of various attempts to remedy modern social ills and argued that abstract political ideologies and social reforms were inadequate. Echoing the concerns of Thomas Carlyle, Dawson contended that 'society is not a mere collection of irresponsible individuals, nor is it a machine for the production of wealth; it is a spiritual organism in which each individual and every class and profession has its own function to fulfil and its own rights and duties in relation to the whole.'⁶⁹ Dawson believed that much to fascism's credit, they and many forms of socialism had embraced this fact, and had reacted against the capitalist order and the liberal notions of freedom by attempting to create order in Europe once again. In contrast to the values and political order found in the Christian tradition, however, the fascists aspired to create a social order that actually bound the life of the individual

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 130.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 131.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 134.

by making the State the ultimate authority in matters traditionally left free from State control. Ironically, then, the inspiration behind the liberal political ideals of Locke and Descartes had actually laid the foundation for, and given rise to, systems that were destructive to the ambitions to which they aspired.

The time had come, Dawson believed, for the democratic nations to re-evaluate the notions of freedom by reconsidering the Christian tradition as a guarantor of liberty through a theological basis, rather than attempting to discredit the pernicious aspects of the new political ideologies with what had become an empty philosophical ideal. For without their theological basis, he believed the humanitarian aspects of the liberal tradition were hollow ideals which would not withstand the pressures of the new State, and which would become secondary in significance to the pragmatic needs of the economic machinery of the nation.

Dawson believed that the ideals of Enlightenment *philosophes* had to be understood within their context. 'The supremacy of law' and 'the moral rights of the individual,' he noted, 'were not creations of modern democracy but the Christian tradition and in this tradition only can they find true justification.'⁷⁰ Following Burke once again, Dawson argued that if the liberal ideals of individual freedom and liberty were to continue as central to the social and political life of Western Civilization, one had to reject the idea of total equality and of autonomous freedom of the individual. Freedom for individuals was to be achieved through constitutional means that could restrain both the power of the State and the capitalist order. The Christian tradition, and more specifically the Catholic Church, retained an established order that could provide this protection. Quoting Pope Leo XIII, Dawson proposed a '*sacred order* by which human action is conformed to

⁷⁰ RMS, 140.

the divine and eternal law.' Although he provided no actual description of how this new relationship could be realized, he did conclude near the end of the book that 'some form of European organization is necessary', which could only be attained 'if we return to the old tradition of Christian Europe and recognize a higher spiritual loyalty than that of blood or class.' Dawson believed there was no alternative to a return to a European unity under the spiritual authority of the Church, for, in the end, the decision was merely a 'choice between the mechanized order of the absolute State, whether it be nominally Fascist or Socialist, [or] a return to spiritual order based on a reassertion of the Christian elements in Western Culture.'⁷¹ In other words, the nations needed to adopt the Catholic ideal of corporativism.

Dawson admitted that the economic program found in *Quadragesimo Anno*, which was an order based on 'vocational groups which bind men together not according to the position they occupy in the labour market, but according to the diverse functions that they exercise in society,' came closer to the ideals of Mussolini than to those of Roosevelt or Chamberlain.⁷² Thus, he concluded that 'there seems no doubt that the Catholic social ideals set forth in the encyclicals of Leo XIII and Pius XI have far more affinity with those of fascism than with those of either Liberalism or Socialism.'⁷³ According to Dawson the corporate ideals of fascism would be more consistent with the Christian tradition than the 'Liberal doctrines of the divine right of majorities.'⁷⁴ Yet if these statements suggest that Dawson had Fascist leanings, they were closely guarded, as he was well aware that

⁷¹ *RMS*, 140-141.

⁷² *Quadragesimo Anno* as quoted in *RMS*, 135.

⁷³ *RMS*, 135.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

the inconsistencies between the Church and fascism made an alliance between the two virtually impossible. This gulf was especially inevitable in respect to their desired ends: the former was spiritual and the latter was strictly material.

Therefore, 'it would be a mistake,' he noted, 'to conclude from this that the political ideals of Catholicism and Fascism are identical or that Catholics can support the Fascist programme without reservations.' Although he most certainly saw Fascism as potentially holding much promise as a means to a Christian State, Dawson was still reluctant to embrace the Fascist programme, as seen in his conclusion:

There still remains a wide gap between the Catholic and Fascist ideals of the State, though both of them are authoritarian and hierarchical. To the Fascist, as to the Socialist, the State is the one social reality which absorbs and replaces all other forms of social organisation. It is its own absolute end and it knows no law higher than that of its own interest. To the Catholic, on the other hand, the State is itself the servant of a spiritual order which transcends the sphere of political and economic interests. Nor has it any right to absorb the whole of human life or to treat the individual simply as a mean to its ends.⁷⁵

Dawson ended the book with a vague and somewhat apolitical challenge that Catholics should take practical measures towards a 'reassertion of the Christian elements in Western culture.'⁷⁶ The challenge was vague because he offered no suggestions about how these elements could be asserted, except through the English Catholic method of political self-expression by intellectual means. It was also somewhat apolitical because the first step towards this end was a moral imperative: the Church was to 'maintain its independence' from the political chaos of the era and Christians were to 'permeate their life and their social and

⁷⁵ *RMS*, 136.

⁷⁶ See Reyes, 'Christian Culture', 184-186. Reyes argues that these following principles are 'at the root of all of Dawson's specific recommendations to the Church in the modern world.'

intellectual culture by their faith.'⁷⁷ Consequently, Dawson was implying that responsibility ultimately lay with individual Christians. 'Wherever Christians cease to be active,' he explained, 'when they rest in a passive acquiescence in what they have received, Christianity tends to lose contact with contemporary culture and the world drifts away from the Church.'⁷⁸ Desiring to avoid any more erosion of the connection between religion and the modern state, Dawson ended the book with an obscure challenge to the reader for social activity on the part of the Christian:

It is clear that the real social mission of Christians is to be the pioneers in this true movement of world revolution: The Spiritual order transcends the order of culture, and it has its own organs and instruments in the world which are not necessarily the ones that are highest in the scale of culture, or the most important from a human point of view.⁷⁹

Dawson's challenge to the reader – that answers to Europe's problems lay outside the realm of politics – was ignored by the majority of reviewers. Indeed, they were much more interested in his opinion about democracy becoming totalitarian and the common ground held by both Catholics and fascists. The question that occupied the minds of most reviewers was, if the answer was outside the realm of politics, why had Dawson made such suggestions in the first place? One reviewer, Richenda Payne, was dismayed that Dawson was 'strangely lenient' towards Italian fascism and that he obviously had a 'leaning to a totalitarian State'.⁸⁰ In an equally critical article for *Inquirer & Christian Life*, J. W. Poynter echoed Payne's observations by claiming that Dawson's 'popularity in certain circles arises from the fact that ... he advocates a kind of semi-Fascism.' Poynter

⁷⁷ *RMS*, 150.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁸⁰ Richenda C. Payne 'Render Unto Caesar: Religion, Freedom and the State' *The Friend* (8 November 1935): 1029-1030; Review of *Religion and the Modern State* in the *Simla Times* 19 September 1935.

concluded the review by stating that the 'book is interesting ... but [contrary to many opinions] Mr. Dawson is not a great philosopher.'⁸¹ Payne and Poynter were not alone in their criticisms. Dean Inge wrote that he could not 'altogether agree with the constructive part of [*Religion and the Modern State*].' Roman Catholicism, he continued, 'is the best of the totalitarian creeds, but it belongs to the same class. It is anti-liberal and intolerant on principle. I detest totalitarianism in religion quite as much as in politics, and I cannot think that this is the way out of our dangers.' Given the Dean's appreciation for Dawson's earlier books, his disappointment in this obvious turn to a more 'triumphalist' commentary on the Church is particularly poignant.⁸² Even the reviewer in Dawson's favourite newspaper, *The Times*, misunderstood his use of the term 'totalitarianism.'⁸³ The *Literary Supplement* claimed that Dawson held a 'favourable opinion of Fascism.'⁸⁴ A week later another reviewer in *The Times* wrote,

[Dawson writes that] there is now emerging a new type of State which claims to control the whole lives of individuals and does not hesitate to call itself totalitarian. Mr. Dawson looks on this type of State with favour. He believes that it offers a real alternative to both Liberalism and Communism, and thinks it probable that forms of it congenial to Anglo-Saxon traditions will evolve both in England and in America.⁸⁵

⁸¹ J. W. Poynter, 'An Authoritarian Philosopher' in *Inquirer & Christian Life*, 26 October 1935. Poynter was especially 'upset' over the contents of *Religion and the Modern State*. In addition to the former review he also wrote a letter to the *East London Observer* (12 October 1935) and another review for *Evangelical Christendom* February, 1936. In both, of course, he was critical of the book.

⁸² W. R. Inge, 'The Old Order Changeth: From the Individual to Society is the Christian Method' in *The Church of England Newspaper*, Friday, 8 November 1940. Christina Scott claimed that Inge was known to have said that Dawson was the only Catholic he could tolerate.

⁸³ According to Christina Scott, Dawson read this newspaper every morning. Clearly Dawson would have been well aware of these accusations.

⁸⁴ 'The Christian and the World' *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 August 1935.

⁸⁵ 'Review of *Religion and the Modern State*' *The Times* (London), 14 August 1935.

In spite of the numerous negative reactions, there were many favourable reviews as well.⁸⁶ A writer for *Universe* called *Religion and the Modern State* 'brilliant' and a 'work of genius.'⁸⁷ In the *Boston Evening Transcript*, Paul W. Facey called the book 'comprehensive' and emphatically suggested that readers 'will not be disappointed.'⁸⁸ Even those who acclaimed the book, however, were disappointed with his vague definitions, confusing concepts, and his failure to provide positive suggestions for political action. One reviewer complained of Dawson's 'perpetual pessimism' written in the 'Spenglerian variety' and lamented that 'Dawson [was] not at his best in this book.'⁸⁹ A writer for *Listener* agreed and complained that he found 'a certain vagueness in his suggestions for an alternative.'⁹⁰

Some of the most important reviews were written for a prominent Catholic weekly, the *Catholic Herald*. The writers for the *Herald* made a deliberate attempt to create some distance between Dawson's controversial conclusions and what was understood as the general English Catholic perspective. In a review published 7 August 1935, F. R. Hoare distinguished between the practical applications of the ideals laid out by Leo XIII in 1893 and the vision of Benito Mussolini. Hoare admitted that English Catholics did indeed want to be made aware of a genuinely

⁸⁶ Approximately half of the 60 known reviews speak favourably of the book.

⁸⁷ 'Problem of Freedom in Our Day: Review of *Religion and the Modern State*', *Universe*, 11 October 1935.

⁸⁸ Paul W. Facey, S. J., 'Religion Divided About the State: Review of *Religion and the Modern State*', *Boston Evening Transcript*, 4 January 1936.

⁸⁹ Jack Common, 'Review of *Religion and the Modern State*', *Adelphi* (September 1935): 377-78. This sentiment was shared by an unknown reviewer who echoed that '[*Religion and the Modern State*] is not perhaps one of his best ...' *Listener*, 17 July 1935. For others this opinion was implied by their confusion concerning Dawson's ideas when comparing them to those in his previous books.

⁹⁰ *Listener*, 17 July 1935.

Catholic 'political programme.' Dawson, in his opinion, had failed to provide it. Lamenting aspects of Dawson's positive analysis of the corporativism of Italian fascism, Hoare wrote that 'it seems ... that this is traceable in part to a tendency, in the diagnosis itself, to identify fascism (otherwise admirably described) too closely with corporative principles.' Along these lines he believed Dawson's 'grasp' to be 'least sure.'⁹¹ In another article for the *Catholic Herald* an unidentified writer believed Dawson to be 'scarcely a safe guide' as 'there are passages in [*Religion and the Modern State*] which seem to treat Corporativism as of the essence of fascism and, furthermore, to identify the Corporativism that, as he says, follows from Catholic principles.'⁹² The position of the *Catholic Herald* was clear: corporativism originated with the social teachings of the popes, and just because fascism made it part of its programme did not mean that it should be supported in that particular political expression. Dawson, they believed, had been too eager to see a home for Catholic social principles and its corporate ideals in the present form of fascism.

The negative reviews initiated a series of letters between the *Catholic Herald* and Dawson that were printed weekly for three weeks after Dawson's publication. The week following Hoare's article, Dawson replied by suggesting that the differences in aim should not cause Catholics to condemn the ideal of a corporate state as merely a tool of fascism. 'The corporative order is not a 'weapon' for the possession of which Catholics and fascists must wrangle, but a necessary form of social organisation which has its ground in nature and reason.'⁹³

⁹¹F. R. Hoare, 'Review of *Religion and the Modern State*', *Catholic Herald*, 17 August 1935.

⁹²*Catholic Herald*, 24 August 1935.

⁹³'Fascism and the Corporative State: A Reply by Christopher Dawson', *Catholic Herald*, 3? August 1935.

This suggestion reveals Dawson's hesitation to condemn Fascism as a political system and his desire to highlight its possibilities. Had the Fascists been able to develop a corporate order without the more negative components such as its anti-semitism and violent authoritarianism, he would have been quick to accept it as compatible with Catholic teachings. Of greater urgency for him was the phenomenon of totalitarianism arising throughout Europe. Clearly, then, Dawson was encouraging future Catholic support of at least *some* form of Fascism, the consequence of his conviction that capitalism and 'State democracy' were dangerous to human liberty: 'Now we may well agree with the Liberal in his condemnation of the ruthless violence of Fascism and of the lack of moral scruples that so often accompanies it,' he continued, 'but I believe it is a mistake to identify Fascism with the evils of Fascism, or to regard it as a mere negative movement of reaction against political progress enlightenment.' He concluded,

Fascism is essentially a revolutionary attempt to solve a desperate situation for the existence of which we more fortunate peoples are largely responsible, and if it fails it would not necessarily involve the abandonment of totalitarian ideals. In all probability it would mean the victory of a state capitalism which would be even more oppressive and would moreover be entirely irreconcilable with Christian social teaching ... State capitalism and dictatorship without Corporativism would be more totalitarian still. To this extent we must sympathize with the fascist experiment.⁹⁴

In a response the following week subtitled 'Mr. Dawson Agrees With Us,' the writer in the *Catholic Herald* highlighted those areas in which they were in agreement. Yet, with respect to practical political action, the author was still rather confused:

We are not quite sure what practical inference [Dawson] would have us draw. We can hardly suppose that he would recommend us to support any policy whose aims were totalitarian for the sake of the method it used in pursuit of those aims. As to whether any existing Fascist movement, in

⁹⁴ *Catholic Herald*, 30 August 1935.

Italy or elsewhere, is at the same time sufficiently corporative and sufficiently free from totalitarian aims to make it possible to support it for the sake of its Corporativism, that is a question of fact on which Mr. Dawson does not express an opinion. As regards Italian Fascism, we would caution our readers against being deceived by names and too hastily assuming that the Corporativism artificially created by Mussolini in Italy ... is identical with the Corporativism that 'has its grounds in nature.' We invite Mr. Dawson to agree with us here, too⁹⁵

After the dust had settled, Dawson responded with both praise and criticism of the *Catholic Herald*.⁹⁶ On the one hand, he was 'glad' to see that there was only marginal disagreement between him and the weekly periodical. On the other hand he was critical of the lack of leadership from the *Catholic Herald* in the promotion of Catholic corporate ideals:

While I sympathize entirely with the Catholic Herald ... I do feel that its advocacy of corporative principles leaves something to be desired. The non-Catholic corporativist may, I think, fairly object that we are much more ready to point where he is wrong than we are to do anything constructive for the realization of the corporative order. I am inclined to think that if it were not for the Fascists, the average man would never have heard of [corporativism]⁹⁷

Dawson's reply revealed a willingness to support a political movement that was, at the time of his writing, a serious threat to the freedom and safety of citizens within most fascist nations, not to mention that of the world. Catholics, he seemed to be saying, should support the ideal of a corporate state by extending that support to fascism as a movement in reaction to capitalism and Democracy. *How* Catholics were to 'support' the idea was still very unclear even though it could only be found in something similar to fascism.

⁹⁵'Fascism and the Corporative State: Mr. Dawson Agrees With Us', *Catholic Herald*, 6 September 1935.

⁹⁶*Catholic Herald*, 13 September 1935.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*

This was an important question that did not go unnoticed by some of the most prominent members of the British Union of Fascists (B. U. F.).⁹⁸ In the 27 September 1935 edition of the *Catholic Herald*, A. Raven Thomson, the Director of Policy for the British Union of Fascists, was clearly intrigued that Dawson gave 'such earnest support for what he describes as a "genuine corporate order which is the only way out of the false dilemma created by the existing conflict between capitalism and socialism."' 'Such a corporate order,' Thomson continued, 'is, of course, the essence of British fascist policy.'⁹⁹ Thomson admitted that establishing corporate ideals in a capitalist society would be virtually impossible without 'recourse to some form of extreme authoritarianism, involving the suppression of those powerful elements in present society who would be bound to resist the institution of a just system in which they could no longer thrive.'¹⁰⁰ In response to this observation, Thomson sought Dawson's insight concerning how corporate ideals could be implemented through non-authoritarian means. The B. U. F. leader's request was obviously facetious as he also criticized Dawson's vacillation on the issue. Thomson wrote,

Does [Dawson] expect that these great capitalist interests to be suddenly actuated by a pure ethical passion for the triumph of justice and morality? Does he await a "change of heart" in the plutocrats and the high financiers who are the lords of the present system, or does he think they will abdicate their supremacy without a struggle? If, like Mr. Christopher Dawson, we are honestly convinced that it is only through the Christian corporative order that society may be justly ruled ... then surely we ought not to shrink from the application of methods of authority, even though they be somewhat unfashionable in this day and age.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸For more on the relationship between English Catholics and the B. U. F. see Thomas Moloney, *Westminster, Whitehall and the Vatican: The Role of Cardinal Hinsley, 1935-43* (London: Burns and Oates, 1985), 55-60 and Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-1985*, 310-317.

⁹⁹*Catholic Herald*, 27 September 1935.

¹⁰⁰A. Raven Thomson in the *Catholic Herald*, 27 September 1935.

¹⁰¹Thomson in the *Catholic Herald*, 27 September 1935.

Dawson did not receive well this overwhelmingly positive response from one of the most prominent leaders in the B. U. F.. As was noted earlier, he had already attempted to distance himself from men such as Oswald Moseley and the British Fascists movement in general the previous year. In spite of Dawson's belief that the political future would look more Fascist than Democratic, he was not yet willing to promote organizations like the B. U. F., but opted instead to take what one can only describe as a wait-and-see position, looking for a more acceptable system for the papal teachings of the nineteenth century.

Thomson's questions and observations raised poignant questions concerning how Catholic political ideals such as corporativism could be implemented peacefully in British society should Dawson be wrong about the future of liberalism and the capitalist order. In essence, Thomson had inadvertently raised another question: what other political options were there for Catholics? Dawson's answer in the years before the Second World War was that there were no options, and that in spite of the lack of specific and concrete methods by which a 'social mission' should create a 'revolution', the contrast between his desire for a corporate state and his seemingly apolitical challenge to his readers to seek a social answer to the political chaos is testimony to his struggle to balance the corporate ideal with the 'model for Catholic political engagement' envisioned by Cardinal Manning: the 'constructive but critical engagement of Roman Catholics with the politics of the liberal, secular, democratic State within a pluralistic society.'¹⁰² Apparently, Dawson believed that developments in the political world after World War I had created both challenges and opportunities to implement the social and political teachings of the nineteenth-century encyclicals.

¹⁰²Von Arx, 264-265.

In spite of the mixed reviews of *Religion and the Modern State*, the publishers were eager for a second printing. Dawson, however, did not share in their enthusiasm. In his opinion, the generally negative reviews overshadowed any positive contribution it may have added to the political debates among Catholics and Protestants. On the one hand Dawson was convinced that if the book was republished unchanged from the first printing, readers would continue to misinterpret him. On the other hand if it was revised before its republication, as Sheed and Ward had planned, readers would think he had changed his mind, confirming that either his arguments had fundamental weaknesses or that the book in its first form was a disaster.¹⁰³ Thus, while the book was republished several years later, it was, for a short time, deferred in favour of other projects more suited to clarify his central ideas.¹⁰⁴

In the months after the publication of *Religion and the Modern State* Dawson suffered 'a combination of heart strain, chronic insomnia and severe mental depression' which ultimately led to a mental breakdown.¹⁰⁵ Rather than completing a major project on the French Revolution he opted instead to write several smaller articles for journals such as *The Tablet*, *Sign*, and *Catholic World*.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³For one of the most extreme examples of one reviewer with this opinion see Maurice B. Reckitt, 'Review of Religion and the Modern State', *The New English Weekly* (September 26, 1935): 389-390. Reckitt, the Anglo-Catholic leader of the 'Christendom Group', was particularly critical of Dawson's grasp of economic issues. 'It has been said that Mr. Dawson, erudite in so many departments of learning, seems to have very little appreciation of the living issues of economics in the modern world, and his references thereto have a conventionality and a superficiality strangely at variance with the originality and force of his thinking on other subjects'. (p.389).

¹⁰⁴Scott, *Historian*, 125-126.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁰⁶The most notable series published during this period was his series entitled 'Religion in the Age of Revolution' *The Tablet*, no. 168, (1936): 265-266; 301-302; 336-338; 477-479; 516-517; 549-551. The articles, in order of publication, are 'The Church and the Revolution', 'Joseph de

In July 1936 the numerous political perspectives of English Catholics took an obvious turn to the right when Civil War erupted in Spain. The majority of 'vocal Catholics' supported Franco with a minority, including Eric Gill and his distributist cohorts, pro-Republican in conviction. From Dawson's perspective, the war had tremendous symbolic significance for the future of Europe. In an article written for *The Catholic Times*, he re-entered the fray once again by championing Spain as the traditional 'bulwark of Christian Europe' and denounced the Communists as the new 'enemy of Christendom.'¹⁰⁷ He maintained that 'The victory of Communism in Spain would be a victory for Communism in its most dangerous aspect for it would not be a victory over capitalism, which is relatively unimportant in Spain, but over Catholicism, which is the very root of the Spanish tradition It may well be that the issue of the struggle in Spain will decide the fate of Europe.'¹⁰⁸

Dawson's opinion should not be understood as representative of that of the greater Catholic population in Britain.¹⁰⁹ The Civil War in Spain divided the Catholic community, in part because it emphasized that the issues central to the war did not allow for 'shades of grey.'¹¹⁰ According to Hastings, the months following the onset of the civil war saw an obvious increase in public declarations on the part of Catholics as to the 'positive values of Fascism' and the 'mystique of

de Maistre and the Counter-Revolution", "William Blake and the Religion of Romanticism", "The Triumph of Liberalism", and "The Turn of the Tide". The last article in the series, which was not given a title, deviated from the title "Religion in the Age of Revolution" to "Religion in *An* Age of Revolution" in order to emphasize the contemporary Revolution taking place in the interwar years.

¹⁰⁷ Christopher Dawson, article on "The Spanish Civil War" published in *The Catholic Times* quoted partially in Scott, *Historian*, 129.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹⁰⁹ Buchanan, "Great Britain", 265. See also Tom Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement* (Cambridge, 1991).

¹¹⁰ Buchanan, "Great Britain", 267.

the Corporate State.'¹¹¹ One writer who was published by Dawson's publisher, Sheed and Ward, wrote in the hope that fascist 'apostles' would help 'England ... attain the happiness of authority in the Corporate State.'¹¹² The Catholic Evidence Guild, he continued, should work in order that 'England may attain the happiness of authority in the Corporate Church.'¹¹³ Clearly statements such as this only confirmed the opinions of many British citizens that Catholicism and Fascism were bedfellows.¹¹⁴ Moreover, by 1937, *The Tablet*, a journal under the control of Cardinal Bourne and arguably the most enduring and scholarly Catholic periodical of the twentieth century, was regularly publishing articles which promoted the economic programs and hierarchical structures of Fascism in a positive manner. The fact that Dawson was one of the journal's directors only served to fuel his reputation as a sympathizer to Fascism. In a letter to fellow director Douglas Woodruff on 21 July 1937, he resigned his position as he believed he had too little say in the direction it was taking. Dawson wrote,

What I feel is that if I cannot take any active part in the direction of the paper or the determination of policy, I do not want to give the public any ground for thinking that I do.¹¹⁵

Since Dawson attempted to clarify his position on the political crisis in Europe in 1935, then, his Catholic contemporaries had become considerably more vocal towards Fascism, or at least openly hopeful in its social and economic

¹¹¹Hastings, 'Reflexions', 118.

¹¹²J.K. Heydon, *Fascism and Providence* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1937), 153 as quoted in Hastings, 'Reflexions', 115.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 153. In fairness to Heydon, however, Tom Buchanan admitted that 'Heydon accepted that once in power fascism may well turn on Catholicism and persecute it. Buchanan, 'Great Britain', 267.

¹¹⁴See Keating, 29-33.

¹¹⁵Excerpt from a letter from Christopher Dawson to Douglas Woodruff, 21 July 1937 quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 127.

promises. Dawson's retreat from his official position with *The Tablet* is indicative of his growing disagreement with his contemporaries' perspectives regarding a political answer to the crisis in Europe. In a letter to his friend George Every, he described his growing alienation from those with whom he once held affinity, such as T. S. Eliot. For a brief period, Dawson was affiliated with Dr. J.H. Oldham's group 'Moot', a group of intellectuals who met to discuss the political issues of the period.¹¹⁶ Dawson's affiliation with them was short lived, however, as he disliked many of their conclusions:

Eliot is a great stand-by and I am very fond of Oldham but I have not got much out of his Moot so far; – possibly because I have only been able to go once, but more I think because it tends towards that alliance of religion and politics which seems to me definitely the wrong path.¹¹⁷

Clearly, Dawson was reluctant to place his allegiance into any of the political philosophies. He discouraged Catholics from political involvement and indeed he believed that too many Catholics and Christians in general in England were drawn blindly onto this 'wrong path.' Both of these personal opinions are clear in the title of his next book, *Beyond Politics*.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶The word 'Moot' means a 'debate' or a 'discussion.' Originally it is an old English word meaning 'an assembly.' As a title for this group it reveals the participant's affinity with the medieval period and the Anglo-Saxon 'moot.'

¹¹⁷Excerpt from a letter from Christopher Dawson to George Every quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 133.

¹¹⁸Christopher Dawson, *Beyond Politics* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1939), hereafter *BP*.

Beyond Politics (1939)

After a four-year break from publishing books, a relatively long hiatus for the prolific writer, Dawson published *Beyond Politics* in 1939, several months before the onset of the Second World War.¹¹⁹ Throughout the greater part of the work Dawson repeated his thoughts and warnings found in *Religion and the Modern State*. 'The issue [is] not merely a conflict between Democracy and Dictatorship or between Fascism and Communism,' Dawson continued to insist, 'It [is] a change in the whole social structure of the modern world, which affects religion and culture as well as politics and economics.'¹²⁰ Still critical of democracy, he lamented with new fervour that the democratic nations had still neither recognized nor adapted to the new social and political realities by making essential political and economic reforms. The consequence of their inaction was a continued erosion of the independent nations' ability to be standard bearers of

¹¹⁹ There were at least thirteen reviews of *Beyond Politics* published between 1939 and 1940. They include: R.H.S. Crossman, *New Statesman and Nation*, 17 (1939): 376-378; William J. Leen, *Thought*, 15 (1940): 176-177; C.J. McFadden, *Catholic Historical Review*, 25 (1939): 354-355; John Moriarty, *America*, 61 (1939): 622; Francis J. O'Malley, *Review of Politics*, 1 (1939): 348-350; J.H. Vaughan, *Commonweal*, 29 (1939): 723; Victor White, *Blackfriars*, 20 (1939): 553-554. Reviews containing only initials included P.C., *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, (1939): 525-526. Unsigned reviews include *Catholic World*, 149 (1939): 635; *Ecclesiastical Review*, 101 (September, 1939): 277-278; *Irish Monthly*, 67 (1939): 294-295; *Sign*, 18 (1939): 763; *TLS*, 1 April 1939, 184.

¹²⁰ *BP*, 3.

freedom against totalitarianism. It would seem just, then, to claim that *Beyond Politics* is a supplement to *Religion and the Modern State*. There are, however, important differences.

At 136 pages, *Beyond Politics* is one of Dawson's shortest books. Like *Enquiries into Religion and Culture*, it is an anthology containing several of the articles he had published after 1935. Although the book was to restate and clarify his thesis from *Religion and the Modern State*, he also attempted to explore potential solutions to growing totalitarianism by considering further the relationship between religion and politics. In comparison to the critical character of *Religion and the Modern State*, *Beyond Politics* was Dawson's attempt to be constructive through an evaluation of the future of liberal democracy in the political life of the emerging 'new age,' and the provision of suggestions for establishing a strong national culture that could remain autonomous, and indeed protected, from the weaknesses he believed to be inherent in abstract political ideologies.

The first chapter described what Dawson believed to be the three stages through which totalitarianism developed in the late modern period. The first, and to him the most important, was the initial economic totalitarianism that preceded its political expression. In apocalyptic tones similar to those found in *Religion and the Modern State*, Dawson reiterated that the modern period had caused 'a transformation of civilization such as the world has never known before.'¹²¹ He conceded to the apparent attractiveness of the transformation. In peace and prosperity the system itself remained rather benign, existing to 'serve human

¹²¹ *BP*, 5.

needs.¹²² Further, through the increased flow of capital it even promised a certain level of economic equilibrium at a popular level. However, modern economic expansion had created an unnatural social structure in the Western world that threatened the liberty and freedom of the individual. When the facades of peace and prosperity were removed, the servant became the master, and the European nations were forced to attempt 'mass organization' to control and tame what he referred to as the 'marvellous mechanical monster.'¹²³ It was this reaction against economic disparity and mechanization that Dawson believed to be the primary factor leading to totalitarianism in political systems.

Not surprisingly, the first nations in the modern era to embrace authoritarian political ideologies were those that were economically disadvantaged. Russia is the clearest example, as its people attempted to find community and unity of purpose in the anti-capitalistic ideals of Marx and Engels. National Socialism in Germany and Fascism in Italy were attempts to organize and protect 'national traditions' and 'national culture' through the 'capture of the State machine by a political party which ... proceeded to reorganize the whole life of the community according to its programme and ideology.'¹²⁴

In *Beyond Politics*, Dawson was careful to point out that the most dangerous form of totalitarianism against which the West needed to fight was what he called 'democratic totalitarianism.'¹²⁵ All of the totalitarian regimes in Russia, Germany and Italy adapted to the cultural background of the nation: in Russia it

¹²² *Ibid.*, 6.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹²⁴ *BP*, 7.

¹²⁵ This is a clear example that Dawson had not changed his mind about the nature of the totalitarian movement.

acclimatised to its peasant background; in Germany, to its 'tradition of authoritative government and military discipline;' and in Italy, to its imperial ideals dating back to the Roman Empire.¹²⁶ The fact that England had no such tradition of authoritarianism did not imply that it was free from the possibility of similar developments. In fact, what Dawson believed to be so dangerous was the subtlety of the trend in his own country. 'It has indeed become the most vital and urgent problem of our time,' he wrote, 'how this [totalitarian] trend is to be reconciled with the traditions of liberty and individualism on which not only the English State but the whole fabric of English culture and social institutions has been built.'¹²⁷ Dawson believed that the totalitarian trend in England was most likely to emerge in the form of increased State control over the economic life of the nation as well as the life of the individual. What he believed was needed was a national unity that was not destructive to the cultural inheritance of the nation.

Dawson, as he had argued in *Religion and the Modern State*, was convinced that the new totalitarian trend throughout the Western world was, at best, merely a move towards social organization that was so absent in the old liberal and capitalist order. Thus, the reaction against democracy and liberalism actually held the possibilities of positive re-organization, which, under certain conditions could actually protect the rights of the individual more than the democratic system itself. 'Everybody recognizes the need for national unity and national organization,' he continued,

but there are few who realize how fundamental are the changes that this involves in our national ways of thought, and fewer still are prepared to pay the price. For if we copy the methods of the dictatorships in a merely negative and defensive spirit, we shall lose our liberty and the distinctive virtues of the English social system without gaining any new inspiration

¹²⁶ *BP*, 7.

¹²⁷ *BP*, 4.

or vision. While if we go the whole way and attempt to base our organization on the positive creed of a political party, we shall run the risk of producing a social conflict which will divide the nation instead of uniting it.¹²⁸

Dawson believed that under the new political and social conditions, the democratic system was fundamentally inept as a guarantor of civil liberties. The democratic system was weakened by a lack of vision and an inability to 'decide fundamental issues.'¹²⁹ Without a sense of ideological conviction, political direction, and a renewed emphasis on order in the democratic nations, the liberal ideals of individual freedom could very easily decline as a fundamental Western ideal. Western civilization, he believed, had emerged soul-less from the First World War, and sceptical of the liberal notions of economic and social progress. The need was to fill this vacuum by creating a new spirit, based on the spiritual inheritance of the past. Dawson argued that it was possible to achieve a similar 'new spirit' without the 'crude and brutal methods' of the dictators; in other words, he was promoting a *via media* between the weakened liberal notions of freedom that were central to democracy and the '*tyrannis* of dictatorship and the fanatical intolerance of a totalitarian party.'¹³⁰ It was in his own country's political history that Dawson found this *via media*, and a study of the British parliamentary system became the heart of the latter half of the book. The remnants of the hierarchical British political system, while almost completely symbolic in both its social and political functions, had within it a national organization that was neither democratic nor totalitarian. Using the recent coronation of George V as an example, Dawson argued that 'the Coronation represents the most solemn and

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

definite consecration of the State to Religion we can conceive.'¹³¹ Somehow, the State had to accept this subordinate position and be re-consecrated once again to higher moral ends.

Thus, in spite of Dawson's fear of complete state control, the State did play an important role in his solution to the political and economic problems of the new age. The greatest need for these democratic nations, he believed, was to create a unity through a non-political 'organization' of the social life of the nation. Just as fascists and communists appealed to history for answers to the social issues of the time, so too should the democracies. What the democratic nations would find was the Christian origins of freedom and ultimately the ideal of a social order which regarded the constitutional rights of the individual and protected the society at large from the mechanizing tendencies of the modern state. His assertion that modern political ideologies were incapable of solving the problems of Europe, nevertheless, did not necessarily mean that he rejected a possible solution for Europe created by a large-scale reorganization of the European political and economic structure under the authority of the Christian religion. By claiming he rejected a 'political solution,' Dawson merely meant that he rejected the political – or 'top-down' – solutions of reform that denied the reality of a spiritual order and its expression in the corporate ideals of the Church. Generally speaking, most if not all 'political solutions' could be rejected on these grounds.

While Dawson was dismissive of political solutions, his vision in *Beyond Politics* demonstrates that he was not completely apolitical in his approach. The democratic states, he believed, threatened by impending economic collapse, were

¹³¹ This chapter of *Beyond Politics* – 'Considerations on the Coronation of an English King' – was published in 1937 under the title 'The Significance of the Coronation'. The article was part of a two-part series for *The Tablet* entitled 'Church, State, and Community'. See Christopher Dawson 'Church, State, and Community', *The Tablet*, no. 169 (1937): 873-75.

being pressured to make decisions that would ultimately shape their future political structure at the fundamental level. He fully believed that, given the choice between the totalitarian regimes of atheistic communism and nationalistic fascism and a hierarchical social order based on the earliest modern British political structure, that the Western democracies would come to embrace the latter. Indeed, a solution to the economic and ultimately the social crises of Europe could be found. 'We have ceased to believe,' he confidently asserted, 'that religion and politics can be kept in watertight compartments; if they are to be entirely separated, it can only be by a surgical operation, as in Spain in 1936, by fire and sword, and if one of the two dies under the operation it is as likely to be the State as the Church.' Most certainly, no other quotation from *Beyond Politics* better captures Dawson's hope for nations to embrace religious ends and be re-consecrated once again.

Beyond Politics was not reviewed as extensively as *Religion and the Modern State*. Although the reason for this is unknown, Bernard Wall, in a letter to Dawson several months after its publication, suggested that it may have to do with poor marketing.¹³² The writer C.S. Lewis loved the book, even though he did find the 'main argument ... too complex to describe.'¹³³ In a letter to his brother, Lewis wrote of the 'clarity with which [Dawson] distinguished between the ideal of "Freedom" and the ideal of "Democracy"'. 'It all seems to fit in quite well', he concluded, '[and] explains why people like us can feel so keenly about "freedom" (making the word safe for "humourists"!) and much less so about Democracy.'¹³⁴ The author who reviewed the book for *Christendom* suggested that creating

¹³² Bernard Wall to Christopher Dawson 1939 STUA box/folder 15/174.

¹³³ C.S.Lewis to Warnie Lewis 21 April 1940, in Walter Hooper (ed.), *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Books, Broadcasts, and the War 1931-1949*, vol. II (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2004), 398.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

institutions to protect the national culture did not necessarily mean a vital connection between the cultural life of the nation and its citizens. 'Assuredly there are social relationships and institutions which are beyond the scope of politics,' he observed,

but many will doubt whether the organisation of culture will preserve it for anything but a glass case. Culture, while it is a living culture, is lived by individual men and women and, though policy should not dictate the nature of cultural activity, it must concern itself with the health of social life, the soil without which there can be no culture. The conception of the aim of politics will and must have a very decisive effect on culture judging from the information we are given, it seems that Mr. Dawson has gone too far beyond politics and ought to be recalled.¹³⁵

The reviewer for *Christendom* was not the only reviewer to express disappointment at Dawson's lack of clarity concerning how his 'religious solution' for renewed social order could be achieved. Concerning Dawson's recommendation for 'some form of social control', a writer for *The New English Weekly* noted that 'what form this discipline should take is not made very clear.'¹³⁶ Struggling to interpret the book's thesis, a reviewer for *The Church Times* observed that 'it appears that [Dawson] would advocate lay rather than clerical initiative. If events are likely to move as swiftly as Mr. Dawson expects, the policy which he urges requires at once more exact definition than he offers in this book.'¹³⁷ The Jesuit, Thomas Corbishley, while confused about the message Dawson was delivering to the reader, at least conceded that 'no facile solution is to be hoped for.'¹³⁸ Perhaps the most enlightening review of the book was written by the editor of the journal *Theology*. In his editorial, he used Dawson's silence as a

¹³⁵ J.D., 'Review of *Beyond Politics*', *Christendom*, (June 1939): 155.

¹³⁶ P. McL., 'Review of *Beyond Politics*' *The New English Weekly*, (Nov. 9, 1939): 60.

¹³⁷ 'Two Roman Catholic Thinkers: Christopher Dawson and Christopher Hollis', *The Church Times*, 24 March 1939.

¹³⁸ Thomas Corbishley, 'Our Present Discontents', *Month*, (May 1939): 439.

platform for his greater frustration with the lack of vision provided by leaders in both the Protestant and Catholic Churches. Several months before the onset of the Second World War, he wrote,

The call for a bold Christian lead becomes increasingly and pitifully insistent. The insistence is pitiful both because of the circumstances which prompt it, and because of the extreme improbability of its being answered. Until definite and practicable proposals for an ecclesiastical initiative are forthcoming, we conclude that the Church leaders are not unwilling, but unable to embark upon any such challenging action as would make an immediate difference to the international situation.¹³⁹

Like Dawson, the editor was quick to observe that individual Christians have a responsibility to lead and organize some effort towards a strong Christian social and political initiative. Such an effort, however, was stifled by a lack of Christian unity and 'the modern apostasy not only of Europe, but of the Churches themselves, from the sovereign claims of God over the whole order of society.'¹⁴⁰ In his concluding remarks the editor suggested, as Dawson had, that Christians ought to 'form small communities which by their manner of life would witness to the sovereignty of God in a world that has rejected it.'¹⁴¹

Dawson's suggestions for cultural renewal, as was noted earlier in this chapter, drew from the papal encyclicals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By using them to inform his commentaries, he attempted to outline a genuinely Catholic perspective on both the economic and political problems of the 1930s. The object of the articles for *The Catholic Times* and *Religion and the Modern State* – made clear throughout both – was to provide an analysis of contemporary political systems rather than a programme for a Christian response. *Beyond Politics* had the additional purpose of recommending actions that could be

¹³⁹ Editorial, *Theology* Vol. XXXVIII, No. 228 (June 1939): 401.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 401.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 405.

taken to counteract totalitarianism in both its cultural and political forms. Clearly, if Dawson was vague, it is because the theory behind the encyclicals was that the Church decides principles but not political details.

Many of the encyclicals to which Dawson referred made pointed references to the 'divine basis of human government' and the need for these governments to accept the reality of a higher order to which they had to submit in order that they may protect the liberties of their citizens.¹⁴² In *Quas Primas* (1925), Pius XI exclaimed that 'With God and Jesus Christ excluded from political life, with authority derived not from God but from man, the very basis of that authority has been taken away, because the chief reason of the distinction between ruler and subject has been eliminated.'¹⁴³ With the individual Christian in mind, the encyclicals also stressed the responsibility for every Christian to 'participate in the works of the apostolate, both individual and social ... because they work for the restoration and spread of the Kingdom of Christ. Only in this ... can we find that true human equality by which all men are ennobled ...'¹⁴⁴ Although both of these themes can be found throughout *Religion and the Modern State* and *Beyond Politics*, Dawson provided very few actual practical suggestions. However, what little he did recommend towards a possible solution was neither the 'world theocracy' as declared in the dissertation of Woolever, nor was it the strictly 'bottom-up' ecumenical solution as described by Reyes; at least not by 1939.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴²Pius XI, Encyclical Letter, *Ubi Arcano Dei Consilio*, 1922, 41. See also 'Rights and Duties of Capital and Labour' Encyclical Letter, *Rerum Novarum*, May 15, 1891. For excellent commentary on this encyclical see John Molony, 'The Making of Rerum Novarum. April 1890 – May 1891' in Paul Furlong and David Curtis (eds) *The Church Faces the Modern World: Rerum Novarum and its Impact* (London: Earlsgate Press, 1994).

¹⁴³Pius XI, Encyclical Letter, *Quas Primas*, 1925, 18.

¹⁴⁴*Quas Primas*, 58.

¹⁴⁵Woolever, 'Christopher Dawson', 1, 348; Reyes, 'Renewal of Christian Culture', 124.

Dawson did not press his point any further than to say that only a solution that took the transcendent religious moral order into consideration could be successful in creating a social order which regarded the constitutional rights of the individual and protected the society at large from the mechanizing tendencies of the modern state. His assertion that abstract political ideologies were incapable of solving the problems of Europe, nevertheless, did not necessarily mean that he rejected a solution for Europe created by a large-scale reorganization of European political and economic structures under the authority of the Christian religion. By rejecting a 'political solution,' he merely meant that he rejected reforms that denied the reality of a spiritual order – something that all political philosophies were eschewing. Generally speaking, because of this fact, all the current 'political solutions' should be rejected – even fascism.

If the first four years of the 1930s were some of the most successful of Dawson's career, the last six years were the least. Upon leaving the area of historiography for the much different world of political commentary, he chose to open himself up to misunderstanding and misinterpretation, both of which characterized this period of his life. As well, the confusion surrounding his political philosophy and its practical application, if any, revealed an intellectual who lived and wrote almost exclusively in the realm of the ideal rather than the practical. Indeed, Dawson's theoretical outlook tended to confound his readers during this period rather than to assist them in achieving a fuller understanding of the Catholic political perspective.

Dawson brought into the debate both aversion from and fear of the State and the political environment in which it was being reshaped. The issues were complicated by his refusal to work within the democratic framework as he readily but falsely announced the end of liberalism and capitalism in the Western world.

His abstract view of Fascism – with the exception of its German expression – as a positive political development in the political fabric of Europe was misguidedly optimistic. It is perhaps not surprising that in the years after the war Dawson's reviewers assessed him as being more Fascist than in reality.¹⁴⁶ Dawson was not a Fascist, but was, ironically a conservative political philosopher who attempted to rescue liberal notions of freedom by trying to understand the forces behind the new and old political systems rather than simply accepting them in their most abstract description of 'democracies' and 'enemies of democracies.'

Dawson's contentions with modernity and even democracy were not new. His conservative criticism of democracy had been stated earlier by Burke, Sorel and Tocqueville, his socialistic views and critique of modernism were in the Romantic tradition of Thomas Carlyle and William Morris, and his answers to these critiques were entrenched in the nineteenth-century Catholic encyclicals. The tension caused by the rise of Fascism, Communism, and National Socialism during the interwar years, however, suggested the reviewers' notions that to criticize democracy and to see a return to the 'old order' was to be opposed to democratic principles and open to the political ideologies that sought to replace them with totalitarianism.

Unfortunately for Dawson his ambitious dream for a return to a hierarchical, re-consecrated system of government in England, and indeed the Western world, was dependent on the continued decline of liberal democracy

¹⁴⁶ Given these conclusions, it should not be surprising that no other period of Dawson's career has been more misunderstood and generated more controversy than his books and articles published during this six-year period. Two dissertations completed during his lifetime provide the clearest examples, and were discussed in the review of literature at the beginning of the present work. See Bruno Schlesinger, 'Christopher Dawson and the Modern Political Crisis' (University of Notre Dame: PhD dissertation, unpublished, 1950) and Ann Elizabeth Woolever, 'Christopher Dawson: A Study in Anti-Democratic International Thought' (University of Toronto: PhD dissertation, unpublished, 1970).

caused by relentless pressure from the non-democratic political systems.¹⁴⁷

Dawson's reluctance to work within the democratic system of his own country relegated his ideals to the realm of the theoretical and, indeed, the unrealistic. Consequently, by 1939, and much to the dismay of his readers, Dawson had yet to propose any practical application towards a solution which could work within the political structure of the time – a project which Catholics in England fully expected their leaders to define.

The corporate ideals as expressed by the papacy in the nineteenth century continued to supply the ideal economic structure for Dawson, even after the war. During the Second World War, however, they would become secondary to other themes that he gave only brief attention before the war – small groups, ecumenism, and religious unity and re-organization. There were hints in his books throughout the 1930s about the need for some form of social movement at the grassroots level among Christian groups to promote a new unity of vision and purpose. The onset of the war caused him to emphasize these as possible practical initiatives. Thus, the concerns of the editor of *Theology* and those who looked for answers from the leadership of the church during the darkest period of Britain's history would find their answer among the laity – the 'Sword of the Spirit Movement.' Indeed, only through the common concerns posed by a Second World War were the pleas of the editor of *Theology* and lay Catholics in general for practical initiatives finally answered.

Even after England declared war on Germany in 1939, Dawson continued to speak favourably of the existence of fascism as a reactionary movement against both liberalism and capitalism. The true enemy, he insisted, was not fascism in its

¹⁴⁷ Dawson's ambition for a planned social order between the world's great religious groups was outlined in his book entitled *The Judgement of the Nations* (1942) and will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

political form but the 'totalitarianism ... of a paternal bureaucracy.'¹⁴⁸ The onset of the War and the very tangible threat the dictatorships posed to Europe was making Dawson's more theoretical diagnosis increasingly difficult to sustain. The war and the polarization of political ideologies had convinced people that rather than a reactionary condition, fascism was a very real threat to democratic freedom and civil liberties. Even more threatening than the dictatorships on the continent was the presence of the British Union of Fascists in the nation's political life. The question on the minds of many in Britain was to what extent this threat existed. In an article written for *The Catholic Herald* in 1939, Dawson offered his own opinion.

Before the article is discussed, one should remember that in the years leading up to the war, Dawson had made bold claims that the British would be forced to adopt some form of Fascism in response to the decline of liberal ideals and the failure of the capitalist order. His article for the *Catholic Herald* reveals that he did not choose to see the presence of Fascism in Britain as a serious threat. On the contrary he saw the B.U.F. as an ideological antagonist which could possibly benefit the future of Britain by underscoring the need for a corporate order. He concluded his article with an analogy that could only be acceptable in the first years of the war, as it would have most certainly be interpreted as treasonous later on.

I believe that the essential conditions which determined the rise of Fascism on the Continent are lacking [in Britain]. We are still far too well off But this does not mean that Fascism may not have a certain part to play here. I have read ... that the Swiss were obliged to introduce a few wolves into their nature sanctuaries because they found that the chamois no longer flourished when deprived of the stimulus of their natural enemies. In the same way a little Fascism may help the professional politicians who have had the game to themselves for so long, to move a

¹⁴⁸ Christopher Dawson, 'Catholics Discuss the War', *The Catholic Herald*, 20 October 1939.

little more quickly. After all the B.F. [British Fascist] wolf is a very little one and the democratic chamois are very fat and self-satisfied. So for my part I wish the little wolf good hunting. The chamois may not like it but it will do them good.¹⁴⁹

It is clear from this excerpt that Dawson continued to hope that the pressure from Fascist dictatorships would force Britain and other democratic nations to embrace 'the corporativist principle for the solution of our social problem.'¹⁵⁰ As he had noted in *The Catholic Herald* several months earlier, Catholics in England needed to embrace the Catholic ideal of a social order and to promote a 'genuine corporative order which is the only way out of the false dilemma created by the existing conflict between capitalism and socialism.'¹⁵¹ It was only a matter of time until the hopes of Catholics such as Dawson, who saw fascism as an indirect aid to the establishment of Catholic social ideals, would be dashed by the political realities of the Second World War. Whereas prior to the war Dawson was generally free to speak of the need for a corporate order and the positive role of fascism as a reactionary movement, Britain's role in a war which became understood as one of democracy against dictatorship made this theoretical approach virtually impossible.

In the end, Dawson's political philosophy was controversial not only for non-Catholic readers but also for fellow Catholics. For the former, his opinions confirmed their belief that English Catholics would happily accept Fascism should democracy founder under the economic conditions of the 1930s. For the latter, his

¹⁴⁹ Christopher Dawson, 'Catholics Discuss the War', *The Catholic Herald*, 20 October 1939.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

commentary was either too praiseworthy of Fascism or not sufficiently sympathetic, revealing deep-seated divisions between Catholics.¹⁵²

For a significant numbers of English Catholics, Dawson's books and articles about politics and the Church provided a bridge between the two very distinct worlds of continental Catholicism and English Catholicism. While at times his analysis of the totalitarian tendencies of all governments after the economic crash of 1929 was both greatly admired and rejected by reviewers, Dawson's much discussed 'religious solution' to combat political and economic totalitarianism, because of its abstraction, left most reviewers confused rather than enlightened. Even from an ideological perspective, much less a practical one, his attempts to clarify the issues were, for the most part, unsuccessful. If one is to judge this period of Dawson's life on whether or not he achieved what his publishers desired, this six-year period must, in its totality, be assessed as a momentous failure which would shape his approach to contemporary issues for the remainder of his career. Yet it may also be argued that his works during this period merely exposed confusion among Catholics about politics that had been central to divisions among them since the late nineteenth century in spite of the attempts by the Vatican to outline a social philosophy that would unify Catholics throughout Europe.

¹⁵²These philosophical divisions transcended English Catholicism and could be seen in the reactions of laymen from other Christian communities who reviewed the series as well.

Part Five

A Changed Atmosphere 1940 to 1945

‘The Sword of the Spirit Movement’

Arthur Cardinal Hinsley was the Archbishop of Westminster when war was declared on 3 September 1939, and his many inspiring talks through the medium of the radio made him immensely popular among Catholics and non-Catholics throughout Europe.¹ For the people of Great Britain in particular, Hinsley’s speeches kindled patriotic fire in the initial weeks and months into the war. On 10 December 1939, Hinsley made a radio address to the British nation entitled ‘The Sword of the Spirit.’ Believing unity to be the greatest need of the hour, he exclaimed that ‘Spiritual values’ are what are to be emphasized by Christians, or else ‘the material warfare will continue to spread ruin over the earth.’² Hinsley also confirmed that national unity must be upheld at all costs, and affirmed that ‘Britain has had as a principal motive for entering the war the defense of the interests of the Spirit ...[and] by the Spirit Britain will conquer.’³ Yet the people of Great Britain also had other responsibilities if this victory was to be achieved. Jonathon Reyes noted that Hinsley’s challenges could be reduced to three ‘areas of concern’:

¹ See Sheridan Gilley, ‘Years of Equipoise, 1892-1942’ in V. Alan McClelland and Michael Hodgetts (eds.) *From Without the Flaminian Gate* (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1999), 53.

² Cardinal Hinsley, ‘Radio Address of Dec. 10, 1939’

³ Cardinal Hinsley, ‘Address of Dec. 10, 1939,’ quoted in Reyes, ‘Christian Culture’, 288.

First, Britain must once again educate her children in Christian truth... Second, all who bear the name of Christian must devote themselves to prayer. Third, all European peoples must return to a commitment to the natural law for the sake of international peace and justice.⁴

Following the papacy's call for the restoration of a Christian order as well as Dawson's challenge to renew Christian culture in the Western world, Hinsley challenged Britons to take seriously the need for Christian unity in the time of crisis. In so doing, Hinsley was reinforcing what English Catholics had been arguing for centuries: to be an English Catholic did not necessarily suggest disloyalty to the nation, since the head of the Catholic Church in England fully supported the nation.⁵ What is important to note beyond the particulars of Hinsley's recommendations, nevertheless, was the range of his vision and therefore the possibility for ecumenism that lay within it. From the perspective of co-operation, Hinsley made the landmark conclusion that Catholics did recognize the validity, at least in part, of the Christian communities outside the Roman Catholic Church, that they could indeed work with them, and that the Catholic Church could take a leading role in providing substantive suggestions for a long term peace program in Europe after the end of the conflict. More importantly, grounding his suggestions in a broad intellectual concept such as natural law left no room for the freedom-denying fascist ideologies, in spite of what some papers, such as the Anglican *Church Times*, were insinuating with examples from the Catholic Church on the continent.⁶ Hinsley's call for unity among Christians represented broader

⁴Reyes, 289.

⁵At least one historian of the period has argued that Hinsley's motive for this period was exclusively to prove to the average English citizen that Catholics were indeed patriotic. See Stuart Mews, 'The Sword of the Spirit: A Catholic Cultural Crusade of 1940', *Studies in Church History*, 20 (1983): 409-420.

⁶A writer in the 4 October 1940 edition, for example, claimed that 'the priests in France are openly with Petain, and probably influence him. The Jesuits, indeed, are largely responsible for that pro-Fascist bias in Rome which seems to us both deplorable and ominous.'

trends and subtle changes in the willingness of the Catholic Church to co-operate with other Christian denominations. Before the Second World War, the Vatican believed that Catholicism and ecumenism were entirely incompatible.

Although Christian ecumenism predates the twentieth century, the chaos surrounding the First World War was a catalyst for further developments in Christian co-operation based on common principles. In spite of numerous requests from Protestants for Catholic involvement in ecumenical endeavours, the Vatican always stood its ground and prohibited any such aspirations among Catholics. Thus in the years following the war, delegates from various Protestant Churches went to Rome to ask Catholic representatives to attend ecumenical conferences in Geneva. Pope Benedict XV responded to their invitation by saying, '[We] earnestly desire and pray that, if the Congress is practicable, those who take part in it may, by the grace of God, see the light and become reunited to the visible head of the Church, by whom they will be received with open arms.'⁷ Although graciously written, Benedict's response was direct, denying the possibility for misinterpretation. Benedict XV's predecessor, Pius XI, was equally opposed to Christian co-operation. In his encyclical *Mortalium Animos*, he echoed Benedict XV by noting, 'If [those who are separated from Us] humbly beg light from heaven, there is no doubt but that they will recognize the one true Church of Jesus Christ and will, at last, enter it, being united with us in perfect charity.'⁸ According to Jonathon Reyes, as the structure of the ecumenical movement became more visible and concrete, so too did the Papacy's reasons for its refusal to become involved. The most notable and obvious reason was that Pius XI believed that the refusal of the

⁷Benedict XV, response to Faith and Order delegation quoted in Charles Boyer, *Christian Unity and the Ecumenical Movement* (London: Burns and Oates, 1962), 30.

⁸Encyclical of Pius XI, *Mortalium Animos* (On Religious Unity), 6 January 1928, 13.

'pan-Christians' to submit to the 'Vicar of Christ' was contrary to Catholic teachings. A second reason lay in the fact that in the ecumenical discussions, the Catholic Church would have been just one of many churches represented, which would undermine the Church's long held position that it was the one true Church of Christ. Lastly, the Pope saw the call to unity in spite of theological differences as a watering down of important theological positions ultimately leading to 'indifference.'⁹ Thus, as Eamon Duffy has explained, Pius XI 'rubbished the infant Ecumenical Movement' and 'made it clear that the ecumenical message of the Vatican for the other Churches was simple and uncompromising: "Come in slowly with your hands above your head."'¹⁰

Although the Vatican had not officially changed its position towards Ecumenism by 1937, it permitted 'unofficial' Catholic representation to conferences in Oxford that same year. Dawson attended the conference and contributed an article entitled 'The Kingdom of God and History' in which he, like Benedict and Pius XI, encouraged all non-Catholic Christians to recognize the Catholic tradition as the only source for unity.¹¹

Hinsley's radio address, then, stretched the limits of Rome's blessing for Catholic cooperation with other Christian denominations, but it still remained true to the spirit of the official teachings of the Church. The Cardinal would have been

⁹Reyes, 270-273. See also *The Papal Encyclicals, 1903-1939*, ed. Claudia Carlen (Raleigh: McGrath, 1981)

¹⁰Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*, 2nd Ed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 345-346.

¹¹Christopher Dawson, 'The Kingdom of God in History' published in H. C. Wood et al. (eds.) *The Kingdom of God in History: A Symposium* (London: George Allen, 1938). Also published in Christopher Dawson, *The Dynamics of World History* (1956; New York: Mentor Omega Books, 1962), 265-280. Dawson's involvement in this conference does not suggest that he was, at this point in his career, waiting to leap into Christian cooperation. It merely suggests he saw it as an opportunity to spread his ideas regarding Christian culture and the Western world. Indeed, as I have noted, the contents of the paper suggests the superiority of the Catholic Church in comparison to other Christian communities.

keenly interested in developments that took place a fortnight after his 10 December 1939 radio address. On Christmas Eve, Pope Pius XI's successor, Pius XII, delivered his famous 'Christmas Allocution' in which he spoke of the 'Christian ideal' as a means to 'common ground.'¹² For Hinsley and other Catholics such as Dawson who valued the possibilities from a spirit of cooperation between all Christian communities, the Pope's words certainly implied that some form of initiative could be undertaken. Nevertheless, Pius XII's Allocution was not an official recognition of the validity of ecumenism, nor was it a sanction for Catholic involvement in any movements that promoted it. Indeed, the ambiguity of the Vatican's position was for Catholics neither a blessing nor a condemnation of future official involvement with other denominations.

Hinsley's appeals for unity caught the attention of numerous prominent Catholics.¹³ His address was discussed in the Plater Dining Club – a group of Catholic intellectuals including Dawson, who met periodically to discuss Catholic social principles among other topics. The club, which included John Murray, S.J., Barbara Ward, and Manya Harari, sought to develop practical suggestions to meet the needs which Hinsley had expressed. The members agreed that Dawson should write a letter to Hinsley in order to gain his insight. Hinsley's reply reinforced his position in his radio address, and emphasized the need for national unity at all costs. English Catholics, he added, had a responsibility to lead the Christian communities in this cause.¹⁴ Thus in spite of his affinity with Franco's cause in

¹²Pius XII, 'Christmas Allocution' in *The Pope Speaks*, ed. Charles Rankin (London: The Catholic Book Club, 1941), 173.

¹³Much of the information I will use in the following paragraphs about this club and the germination of the 'Sword of the Spirit Movement' is taken from Jonathon Reyes' dissertation. Reyes was the first Dawson scholar to explore and take seriously Dawson's involvement with the Sword of the Spirit movement. See Reyes, 'Christian Culture', 289-291

¹⁴Hinsley to Dawson, 17 July 1940, USTA Box/Folder 7/99.

Spain before the war, Hinsley's response to Dawson revealed that he clearly wished to work for unity and peace in spite of ideological differences with those outside the Church.

The concern of most members, however, was the continued erosion of unity between Catholics throughout Europe. In his response to Hinsley's letter, Dawson offered numerous recommendations about how a movement could be formed. These recommendations included local groups meeting in homes, prayer, spiritual retreats, a press campaign, public lectures, and leaflets which could unite Catholics against the forces which sought to divide them.¹⁵ The exchange of letters over the next three months between Hinsley and Dawson revealed their affinity in areas such as cultural renewal and unity. Even before this exchange of letters and recommendations, Hinsley followed Dawson's career with keen interest. Although the details of a movement for Catholic unity were not clearly delineated, it was clear that Hinsley had great plans for Dawson in whatever strategy developed. A vital first step, and one which demonstrated his confidence in Dawson, was to appoint him successor to the deceased Algar Thorold as editor of *The Dublin Review*.

In his first editorial for the review, Dawson reiterated Hinsley's radio address of 10 December 1939 by alerting listeners to the urgent need for unity during the war. The temptation, as he had noted throughout the five years before the war, was to reduce it to a battle between democracy and fascism, or more specifically, 'left' and 'right' ideologies. The danger of this oversimplification was that it divided rather than unified, creating a polarization of various ideologies. Rather than stressing the totalitarian tendencies of all these ideologies as in

¹⁵The list of Dawson's recommendations as written in his letter to Hinsley is taken from Reyes, 291. The original letter – which I have not seen – is in the Westminster Diocesan Archives.

Religion and the Modern State and Beyond Politics, he instead warned of the disunity created by such an emphasis on abstract philosophical differences: 'The great obstacle to any common intellectual action ... during the last twenty years has been the division of thinkers and writers as well as politicians and economists into two opposite camps – "The Left" and "The Right," which gives a partisan character to all intellectual activity and leaves no room for common action.'¹⁶ In response to this 'fundamental misconception,' it was 'the duty of those elements in Western Society that still possess a principle of spiritual unity to rally the divided forces of [Western] Civilization [in order to] stand for principles and values which modern civilization had denied or forgotten, but without which European culture cannot exist.'¹⁷ Although not explicitly a call for some kind of ecumenical endeavour, there was an implicit *ad hoc* recommendation that Christians should seek a unity of purpose on the basis of their common Christian principles in order not only to support the effort against England's enemies but also to help fight the war against cultural disintegration.¹⁸ Dawson's challenge to all Christians to work for the common good, however, was not based on the notion that all Christian denominations were equal in terms of what they could contribute. He made a distinction by noting that it was the Catholics who had 'a special responsibility' as the 'heirs and successors of the makers of Europe ... to maintain and strengthen the unity of Western culture which had its roots in Christendom against the destructive

¹⁶ Christopher Dawson, 'Editorial Note' *The Dublin Review*, no. 207 (1940): 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2. For more on Dawson's opinion concerning the Left versus Right in politics see 'Left-Right Fallacy', *Catholic Herald*, London 9 November 1945. Reprinted in *Catholic Mind*, no. 45 (1946): 251-253.

¹⁸ Dawson, 'Editorial Note', 1.

forces which are attempting its total subversion.'¹⁹ These recommendations set the standard for all his subsequent commentary during the Second World War.

Soon after Dawson's editorial was published, it was agreed that an official movement should begin as soon as possible. Early in August 1940, Hinsley announced to his Bishops that he had initiated a movement as a result of being 'urged on by prominent lay people' in his diocese. The endeavour was called the 'Sword of the Spirit,' with the purpose to 'secure more united and intense prayer and study and work among Catholics in the cause of the Church and of our unity.'²⁰ According to Moloney, the only extant reply to his letter was from Bishop Williams, who admitted that the idea was 'magnificent and full of possibilities.'²¹ The Bishop's reaction, however, was not all praise, as he had numerous complaints which included the need for a more complete definition of terms, and the inclusion in the Executive Committee of too many women and nationally known figures who had openly supported Franco.²² The partially negative response from Williams and the tepid response from the hierarchy in general revealed a lack of support that would stifle Catholic involvement and in general inhibit the growth of the movement as an ecumenical endeavour. Nevertheless, in spite of these challenges, the 'Sword of the Spirit' movement became a reality, as Cardinal Hinsley announced its inception from the Throne Room at Archbishop's House,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁰ Hinsley to Ordinaries, 7 August 1940, WDA, 1/174. See Thomas Moloney, *Westminster, Whitehall and the Vatican: The Role of Cardinal Hinsley*, 186-187.

²¹ Williams to Hinsley; quoted in Moloney, 187-188.

²² Moloney, *Westminster*, 188. Although Moloney does not make the connection, clearly Dawson may be included in the latter group.

Westminster, on 1 August 1940, and its conception was met with the highest of expectations.²³

In his inaugural address, Hinsley referred to the movement as a 'campaign of prayer, study and action' with the 'fundamental aim' of the 'restoration in Europe of a Christian basis for both public and private life, by a return to the principles of international order and Christian freedom.'²⁴ Hinsley further involved Dawson in his plans by inviting him to be the movement's vice-president.²⁵ Dawson accepted the position and was declared by the first bulletin of the movement to be the 'leader of the whole movement.'²⁶ Indeed, both the ethos and contents of Dawson's scholarship were significant factors in the direction of the movement and its hope for a renewal of Christian culture. Hinsley encouraged those who became involved in the movement to hold high 'those principles ... rooted in the Law of Nature which is common to all mankind and recognizes no absolute superiority of race or colour.'²⁷ The noble goal of the restoration of a Christian Europe corresponded with an equally urgent exhortation for unity in England. Indeed, in order to continue defusing the claims that Catholics were

²³There is a relatively small amount of material that has considered the Sword Movement. In addition to Moloney's book on Cardinal Hinsley and Stuart Mews' book, there is also a book and an article by Michael Walsh, *From Sword to Ploughshare* (London: Russell Press, 1980) and 'Ecumenism in War-Time Britain: The Sword of the Spirit and Religion and Life, 1940-1945,' 2 Parts., *Heythrop Journal*, 23 (1982): 243-258; 24 (1982): 377-394. The best analysis of the movement is in Jonathon Reyes' dissertation, as he uses extensive primary material including letters and official documents from the movement.

²⁴'SOS Bulletin No.1,' 'Fundamental Aim', USTA Box/Folder 7/99.

²⁵Scott, *Historian*, 137. According to the second bulletin of the movement and an article published in 1941 by A. C. F. Beales, it was the contents of Dawson's editorial in *The Dublin Review* that was the catalyst for the movement.

²⁶'SOS Bulletin No.1,' 10 August 1940, USTA Box/Folder 7/99.

²⁷*Ibid.*

disloyal citizens, the movement was intensely nationalistic in the weeks that followed its inception.

If there had been any doubts in the average English citizen about the official position of the English Catholic Church on the war, Hinsley's speech would undoubtedly have changed their minds.

Our Island has become a fortress, defended by our seamen, our soldiers, and our airmen To these brave men, who have sprung to arms and dedicated their lives to protect us and to guard our freedom, we owe our admiration and gratitude. Whatever be the mistakes or misdeeds Englishmen have at different times committed, we are convinced that in this present conflict Britain has justice on her side.²⁸

In his first editorial as vice-president of the movement, Dawson followed Hinsley's patriotic call for national unity. Entitled 'The Moral Basis of National Unity,' the article highlighted the need for Catholics to strive for 'peace aims' and ways in which they could 'best contribute to the national resistance and to national unity.'²⁹ Echoing his words of praise in *Beyond Politics* for the English tradition and cultural institutions, he exclaimed patriotically:

It has always been the strength of England that politics and religion have never been set against one another as they were, for example, in France. The English tradition has always recognized the rights of religion, and the importance of the religious element in national life, although owing to the absence of religious unity, it has often failed to apply it in practice On the purely political level, justice is apt to become confused with self-interest, and national unity may mean no more than a will for national self-preservation. It is only by the force of Christian justice and charity that this unity can become a spiritual reality.³⁰

In contrast to his warnings of nationalism in his earlier books such as *Progress and Religion* and *The Making of Europe*, Dawson adapted his views to the conditions of the war and emphasized that nationalism could only be morally

²⁸ Cardinal Hinsley, 'Inaugural Address,' SOS Bulletin No.1, 4. USTA Box/Folder 7/99.

²⁹ Dawson, 'Editorial for SOS Bulletin no. 2, 23rd August 1940, 3.' Also published as 'Moral Basis of National Unity', *The Tablet*, no. 176 (1940): 172.

³⁰ Dawson, 'Editorial', 3.

justified as long as it extended beyond the superficial drive for the economic and political superiority which had characterized European nations since the fifteenth century. It was on the 'religious factor,' and more specifically on the Christian social values of 'faith, hope, and charity,' that true *patria* should be based.³¹

The emphasis that was placed on the need for national unity did not limit the movement to strictly nationalistic aims. There was a push among those involved to extend it to the continent in order to bring encouragement to 'exiled' Catholics in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Belgium, among other countries.³² Not all members, however, including Dawson, shared this vision. In a letter to the editor, Dawson warned against any action that might 'represent Catholicism as an anti-national force.'³³ He emphasized the need for the 'Sword' to explore and confirm 'our community with other Englishmen in this struggle.'³⁴ In his suggestion, Dawson, ironically, seemed to want to steer the movement away from encouraging unity among all Catholics – a goal upon which the movement was originally founded – while at the same time attempting to seek unity with non-Catholics in his own country. This was not an ambition that had been officially stated as an original aim, in spite of the rhetoric of national unity. Indeed, the war had made the anti-nationalist Dawson into a nationalist.

Still unclear about its ultimate goals, the movement flourished in the first year of its existence. By the end of 1940, parish groups had been formed in six dioceses, with membership numbers rising close to 2000.³⁵ In spite of Dawson's

³¹*Ibid.*

³²Moloney, 189.

³³Dawson in *The Tablet*, 31 August 1940, 172 as quoted in Moloney, 189.

³⁴*Ibid.* Moloney, 189.

³⁵Reyes, 312.

concerns, by March 1941 the 'Sword' had become a European movement, promoted on the continent as a means to unity among Catholics in at least six countries.³⁶ It was generally welcomed in all these countries and met similar success to that enjoyed in England, surviving attempts by Nazi propagandists to use the movement for their own benefit.

The 'Sword' also began to develop into an ecumenical movement. Edith Ellis, a Quaker, arranged for the four Church leaders in England – the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Gordon Lang; the Archbishop of York, William Temple; the Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council, Walter Armstrong; and Cardinal Hinsley – to sign a joint letter to the *Times*. The letter included "ten points for an agreed Christian order", five of which had been drawn up by Pope Pius XII in his 'five point peace plan.' The other five were extracted from the conclusions of the Oxford Conference of 1937. After listing the ten points, the letter concluded with the following challenge:

We are confident that the principles which we have enumerated would be accepted by rulers and statesmen throughout the British Commonwealth of Nations and would be regarded as the true basis on which a lasting peace could be established.³⁷

After this letter was published in the *Times*, non-Catholics began to look at the 'Sword' movement as a means to promoting the unity described in the letter.

Archbishop Lang wrote a letter to Hinsley asking if the movement was open to other Christian communions. For ecumenical Anglicans such as Bishop Bell of Chichester, having a member of the Catholic hierarchy – indeed the Archbishop of Westminster – promoting unity with other Christian denominations was a rather

³⁶ Moloney, 189-192.

³⁷ 'Letter to the *Times*' December 21, 1940. This letter was included as Appendix A in Reyes, 387-388.

astonishing development considering the official position of the Vatican.³⁸ Hinsley and his executive committee responded by inviting members of the Church of England and the Free Churches to attend joint meetings at Sir Oswald Stoll's theatre in London. Despite being held during some of the most intense bombings by the Luftwaffe, the meetings were very well attended, demonstrating the extent of the enthusiasm for unity towards the restoration of a Christian order in the national life of Britain and Europe. This optimism was mirrored in Dawson's only book published during the war, *The Judgment of the Nations*.³⁹

³⁸ According to Reyes, Bishop Bell, 'a leading promoter of the ecumenical movement,' was the impetus behind the letter from Archbishop Lang. Reyes noted further that 'he was the main point of contact with the Sword through the war, and it is largely because of his persistence that the archbishop of Canterbury and the archbishop of Westminster maintained contact despite later difficulties.' Reyes, 313.

³⁹ Christopher Dawson, *Judgement of the Nations* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1942), hereafter *JON*.

The Judgement of the Nations (1942)

Like many of Dawson's earlier books, *The Judgement of the Nations* was actually an anthology of articles, most of which were specifically written for the 'Sword' movement.⁴⁰ Dawson chose to divide the book into two sections: 'The Disintegration of Western Civilization' and 'The Restoration of a Christian Order.' Those who were familiar with Dawson's books and articles would clearly have known the themes of the first section. Comprised of six short chapters, it contained brief yet concise summaries of the decline of European unity, the demise of liberalism, the rise of totalitarianism, the failure of the League of Nations to achieve its peace aims, and, of course, the need for nations to embrace the reality of an order that 'transcends politics and economics' rather than just the law of their

⁴⁰*The Judgement of the Nations* was reviewed extensively. Some of the reviews include Raymond L. Mooney, 'Leaven for World Peace', *America*, December 26th, 1942, 330; 'Return to United Christendom?', *The Times Literary Supplement*, March 6th, 1943; James M. Egan, *Peace News*, Vol. I, No. 10 and 11 (November-December 1942); J. McS., 'The Judgement of the Nations', *The Catholic World*, (Nov. 1942): 244-245; 'Politics and National Law', *Church Times*, 5 March, 1943; *Congregational Quarterly*, April 1943; *The Christian World*, 18 March 1943; Virgil R. Stallbaumer, *The Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (March 1943): 567; Ivan Gerould Grimshaw, 'The Hope of the World' *The Protestant Voice*, 13 November 1942; Andrew Beck, 'Review of *The Judgment of the Nations*' *The Clergy Review*, Vol. XXIV, No. 3 (March 1944): 97-108; 'The European Tradition' *British Weekly*, 18 March 1943; S. Sagar, 'Review of *The Judgement of the Nations*' *The Weekly Review*, (March 4, 1943): 271-272; *The Wall St. Journal*, 7 October 1943; J.J.M., 'Review of *The Judgement of the Nations*', in *The Labour Leader*, December 31st, 1942; 'Essay in Integration' *The Guardian*, 19 March 1943; G. MacE., 'Problems of the Nations', *Irish Independent*, 22 February, 1943; Willoughby Dewar, 'The Western Heritage', *Time and Tide*, 6 March 1943; 'Ariel', 'The Crisis of Christendom', *Huddersfield Examiner*, 24 April, 1943; C.C. Hamilton, 'Past, Present, Future' *The Canadian Register*, November 7, 1942; John O'Connor, *The Church World*, Friday, 9 October 1942.

'own needs and ambitions.'⁴¹ Dawson believed that the Church, which had consistently upheld this order as a social ideal, was the institution to which the modern world had to look for peace and stability. Although the Church retained this tradition, it had been incapacitated through large-scale schisms and internal divisions. In order for the Church to take an active role in the reordering of Europe, it had to become a unified force once again. Generally speaking, then, the ambitions in the book mirrored those of the 'Sword.'

In the chapter entitled 'Religious Origins of Disunity,' Dawson argued that 'the more we can bring to light these hidden sources of misunderstanding and conflict, the more hope there will be of a spiritual reconciliation which is the only true foundation of international peace and order.'⁴² He concluded that 'the problem of the reunion of Christendom has a much closer relation to the cause of world peace than is generally realized.'⁴³ With this ambition in mind, Dawson proceeded to demonstrate the religious origins of European political disunity in the philosophies of two great reformers, Martin Luther and John Calvin.

'Lutheranism and Calvinism,' Dawson noted, 'in spite of their fundamental theological agreement have produced or helped to produce totally different social attitudes and have become embodied in opposite political traditions.'⁴⁴ Citing Troeltsch's conclusions in *The Social Teaching of the Christian Church*, Dawson highlighted the disintegrating effects of Luther's emphasis on personal religious

⁴¹This section is essentially an anthology of Dawson's earlier essays. They include, in the order that they appear as chapters, 'The Hour of Darkness', *The Tablet*, no. 174 (1939): 625-26; 'Democracy and Total War', *The Dublin Review*, no. 207, (1940): 4-16; 'Religious Origins of European Disunity', *The Dublin Review*, no. 207, (1940): 142-159; 'The Breakdown of the League', *The Tablet*, no. 174, (1939): 665-666. The only exceptions are chapters 4 and 6: 'The Failure of Liberalism' and 'The Secularization of Western Culture' respectively. *JON*, 6-7.

⁴²*JON*, 36.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 39.

experience over the authority of the Church on the German approach to philosophy and nationalism. 'The Lutheran tradition,' he explained,

with its strange dualism of pessimism and faith, otherworldliness and world affirmation, passive quietism and crude acceptance of the reign of force, has been the most powerful force in the formation of the German mind and the German social attitude. It played a considerable part in the development of German idealism. It lies behind Hegel's exaltation of the Prussian state as the supreme expression of Absolute Spirit, and his conception of History as the manifestation of God in time, so that *Welt-Geschichte* and *Welt-Gericht* – world history and world judgement – are the same.⁴⁵

For Dawson, then, the pseudo-religious character of German nationalism could be traced back to Luther's conservatism, which treated the State not as a divinely appointed institution (a long held Catholic belief) but as an institution with an authority that is autonomous from that of Rome.

In spite of the similarities between Calvinism and Lutheranism, it is in their ideal relationship between Church and State that they had the least in common. Contrasting the authoritarian approach to politics of the Lutheran tradition, Dawson noted that the Calvinistic tradition asserted the independence of the spiritual power as well as its supremacy over that of the State.⁴⁶ 'In this respect,' he noted, 'it carries on the traditions of medieval Catholicism and of the Gregorian movement of reform to an even greater degree than did the Catholicism of the Counter-Reformation itself.'⁴⁷ Socially, Calvinism 'inspired Protestantism with the will to dominate the world and to change society and culture.'⁴⁸

⁴⁵ JON, 43. See Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (Chicago: 1976). JON, 39-40.

⁴⁶ JON, 45.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

Dawson went further to highlight the similarities between the Catholic and Calvinist conception of the natural law. In contrast to Luther's natural law of 'irrationalism' in which he stressed the political components of the law, the Calvinist tradition maintained the law's moral qualities 'as a norm to which all social and individual behaviour must conform and which rests, in the last resort, on the will of God, as revealed to man's reason and conscience.'⁴⁹ Dawson explained:

For on the one hand the Catholic political tradition in the narrower sense, i.e., the historic type of the Catholic state, agrees with the Lutheran-Continental tradition in its authoritarianism, its conservative traditionalism, and its acceptance of a strict corporative order of society. On the other hand, it stands far closer to the Western-Calvinist tradition in its view of the relation of the Church to the state, in the primacy of the spiritual power, above all in its conception of Natural Law.⁵⁰

Dawson was optimistic that a reunited Christendom could fuse these two elements of a corporative and authoritative society with the freedom-granting acknowledgement of natural law as the basis for liberty. Again, with his belief that liberalism was a spent force, Dawson warned that the notions of abstract human rights of secular humanism were threatening to undermine the long held belief that morals, ethics, and human rights find their basis in a higher law and order. The erosion of the basis for social and political action was 'the dilemma of a secularized culture,' one which cannot be avoided by either a 'humanitarian idealism which shuts its eyes to the irrational side of life, or by a religion of personal spirituality which attempts to escape into a private world which is rapidly being liquidated and drained away by the social engineer.'⁵¹ It was only by a return

⁴⁹ *JON*, 51-52.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

to the natural law, Dawson concluded, that the democratic nations could find their basis of liberty.⁵²

Dawson had great hopes that his contemporaries' desire for unity might lead to a restored Christian order in the political and economic life of Europe and the Western world. He believed this could be done only by 'the free co-operation of all those who recognize their inherence in the common spiritual tradition of Western civilization and the necessity of creating an organic communion between the scattered and disorganized elements of freedom which still exist though they are politically divided and almost powerless.'⁵³ He concluded his analysis of liberalism with the challenge that 'the essential thing is to adjust our thought to the new conditions; to see what is living and what is dead in the Western tradition.'⁵⁴ Dawson did not divulge how one could adjust or in what ways, but he did imply such ways as he explored the new conditions in the second half of the book.

The latter half of the book is a patchwork of essays originating from the discussions of the 'Sword.' In the first chapter of this section, Dawson explored the history and future concepts of a planned society. Social planning, according to Dawson, first appeared in the nineteenth century as a social philosophy based on the rights of the individual and in response to inequality within the state. In the early twentieth century, it became a means to political action as seen most clearly in Communism and National Socialism. As Dawson had argued before the war, it even influenced to some extent Roosevelt's 'New Deal.'⁵⁵ In its twentieth-century form, then, it is an essentially political phenomenon: 'This is the vital issue. Is it

⁵²*Ibid.*, 56.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 71.

⁵⁴*JON*, 71-72.

⁵⁵*RMS*, 23; *JON*, 114.

possible to develop a planned culture that will be free? Or does cultural planning necessarily involve a totalitarian state?'⁵⁶ To help answer this question, Dawson turned to the ideas of the sociologist and frequent attendee of Joseph Oldham's 'Moot,' Karl Mannheim.⁵⁷ In his book *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction*, Mannheim had attempted to explore how mass society was to be managed.⁵⁸ Upon considering Mannheim's observations, Dawson wrote,

Now in the case of a modern planned society the problem is whether we can replace the enforced *Gleichschaltung* of the totalitarian dictatorships by a free co-ordination of all the social elements, a process which Dr. Mannheim compares to the orchestration of a symphony. But a symphony involves a composer as well as a conductor – and where is the composer to come from? It is, it seems to me, the ideal of the Philosopher King or the lawgiver of a Platonic Republic.⁵⁹

As to Dawson's own view of a planned society, he was not against such propositions, especially in the light of his suggestions in *Beyond Politics* for an organization of culture that transcended the domain of politics. Yet in order to avoid the organization from becoming totalitarian, it had to 'leave room ... for the intervention of a power which transcends planning.'⁶⁰ For, as he clarified, 'the only way to desecularize culture is by giving a spiritual aim to the whole system of organization, so that the machine becomes the servant of the spirit and not its

⁵⁶ JON, 119.

⁵⁷ For a brief but excellent summary of Mannheim in the context of twentieth-century historiography, see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 159-161.

⁵⁸ Karl Mannheim, *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* (London: Routledge, 1940) Mannheim influenced the political perspectives of many who were involved with 'Moot.' For more on Mannheim's views see A. P. Simonds, *Karl Mannheim's Sociology of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) and D. Kettler, et al. *Karl Mannheim* (London: Ellis Horwood/Tavistock, 1984).

⁵⁹ JON, 121.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 128.

enemy or its master.'⁶¹ In the end, as was usual, Dawson does not indicate how a planned society might work in its ideal form. More important than a 'top-down' social planning, however, was the responsibility of individual Christians, indeed a grassroots revolution. He even went as far to say that 'it is not necessary to talk much about the ways and means, for the ways of the Spirit are essentially mysterious and transcend human understanding.'⁶²

Reiterating his rebuke in *Religion and the Modern State*, Dawson believed that much of the responsibility for the decline of the West could be placed on the Church and individual Christians. He lamented:

It is not simply that modern civilization has become secularised, it is that Christians have allowed civilization to become secular. In the past the Church provided the spiritual leaders and teachers of Europe. It controlled the universities, it possessed in every town and village in every land of Christendom a centre of instruction for the preaching of the Gospel and the formation of Christian opinion. If this has been lost, as it has been lost almost entirely, we cannot refuse all responsibility and put the blame on the shoulders of the rationalists and the anti-clericals.⁶³

Yet, in striking contrast to his pessimism in *Religion and the Modern State* and, to a lesser extent in *Beyond Politics*, Dawson was clearly optimistic. Indeed he seemed to find solace in the tragic state of the world around him, as he believed that social disintegration was 'a typical phenomenon of periods of transition, and it is often followed by a sharp reaction which prepares the way for a spiritual renaissance.' Preceding this renaissance would be a 'new out-pouring of spiritual energy manifested in the Christian life.'⁶⁴ Dawson concluded the book with the following statement:

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 182.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 184.

The power of the Spirit is the only power that is strong enough to overcome [the mystery of lawlessness]. In its strength Christians in the past faced and overcame the pagan civilization of the Roman Empire and the pagan savagery of their barbarian conquerors. The new paganism that we have to face today is more terrible than either of these in its cold inhumanity and its scientific exploitation of evil. But if we believe that even these evils can be conquered, they are powerless against that Spirit who is the Lord and Giver of Life. And in the same way all their new and elaborate devices for the enslavement of the human mind are powerless against those higher powers of spiritual understanding and love which are the essential gifts of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁵

General optimism such as this was at the heart of the 'Sword' movement, and led to acclamation for *The Judgement of the Nations*. In an article entitled 'Essay in Integration,' an anonymous author in the liberal newspaper *The Guardian* praised Dawson for balancing two ideologies that have traditionally been understood as fundamentally opposed to each other. In *The Judgement of the Nations*, '[Dawson] divests the wise conservatism of Burke ... from its unacceptable garment, the defence of obsolete privilege, and unites it with all that is noble and truly liberal in the Liberal tradition.'⁶⁶ The *British Weekly* praised Dawson for not attributing all the present 'evils of the world to Protestantism.'⁶⁷ Raymond L. Mooney, in an article for *America* entitled 'Leaven for World Peace,' exclaimed that the book was a 'brilliant essay' as a 'planner of the world to come.'⁶⁸ A less enthusiastic reviewer for the journal *Sociology* argued that although the thesis of the book was 'interesting,' it would 'probably not find ready acceptance among either Catholics or Protestants.'⁶⁹

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁶⁶ 'Essay in Integration', *The Guardian*, March 19, 1943. USTA Box/Folder 16/43.

⁶⁷ 'The European Tradition', *British Weekly*, March 18, 1943. USTA Box/Folder 16/43.

⁶⁸ Raymond L. Mooney, 'Leaven for World Peace', *America*, December 26, 1942. USTA Box/Folder 16/43.

⁶⁹ M. H. Leiffer, 'Review of *The Judgement of the Nations*', *Sociology*, undated. USTA Box/Folder 16/43.

In one of the most well known reviews of the book, William P. Davey popularized what has become known among scholars of Dawson's work as the 'radical rupture' theory. Davey believed that *The Judgment of the Nations* revealed that the circumstances of the war had created a 'Copernican revolution' in Dawson's thought. Davey wrote,

after due consideration, we have been forced to the conclusion that the present work of Mr. Dawson is puzzling and disturbing. Many times it is difficult to recognize that the man who wrote *Religion and the Modern State* and *Beyond Politics* is also the author of *The Judgement of the Nations*. The author's views in this book are sharply at variance with those advanced in previous works.⁷⁰

Davey's sense that Dawson had a change of heart is not entirely misguided. When *The Judgement of the Nations* is compared to his earlier works, the tone of the book is fundamentally different from them. Why Davey found these differences 'disturbing' is a mystery, but he did make a noteworthy point about a change in Dawson's approach and perspective during the war, even if he exaggerated it.

Davey was not alone in this observation of transformation in Dawson. Those who have studied this period of Dawson's career have come to disparate conclusions about whether or not he changed his views after Britain declared war on Germany in 1939. Thus Bruno Schlesinger, a graduate student at the University of Notre Dame and later a friend of Dawson, argued that *The Judgement of the Nations* revealed a 'significant change' in Dawson's opinions concerning democracy, liberalism, and totalitarianism.⁷¹ Schlesinger goes on to write that

it is surprising that this significant revision of Dawson's views has escaped the attention of his numerous able reviewers. Since Dawson himself does not reveal any reasons, it is rather difficult to account for his change of mind. It may well be the result of more extensive studies. More

⁷⁰William P. Davey, 'Review of *The Judgement of the Nations*, by Christopher Dawson,' *Thomist*, 8 (January 1945): 136.

⁷¹Bruno Schlesinger, 'Christopher Dawson and the Political Crisis' (University of Notre Dame, PhD dissertation, unpublished, 1949), 55.

than likely, under the impact of contemporary events Dawson examined critically his former views and discarded some of them.⁷²

There are elements of truth in Schlesinger's observations, but as an attempt to provide evidence for a radical change of thinking, the thesis, as a whole, suffers from several important misinterpretations of terms and from an exaggeration of Dawson's 'new' perspectives in relation to those held before the war.

According to Schlesinger, 'in *Religion and the Modern State and Beyond Politics*, Dawson conceived liberalism exclusively as the erroneous philosophy condemned by Pope Pius IX and Pope Leo XIII which saw unlimited liberty and the rejection of authority.'⁷³ In contrast to this one-sided perspective, Schlesinger noted that during the war Dawson attained a more nuanced understanding of liberalism by explaining it in three forms: as a tradition, as an ideology, and as a political party.⁷⁴ The liberal tradition, Schlesinger noted, was especially important as it represents a 'long quest for freedom.'⁷⁵ The same change in perspective can be detected in Dawson's later analysis of democratic ideals. Schlesinger takes note of this shift: 'his re-evaluation of liberalism leads by necessity to a revision of his view of democracy.'⁷⁶ In *The Judgement of the Nations*, Dawson was more willing to emphasize the Christian elements of democracy rather than its secular humanist elements:

The driving force behind the development of western democracy has been the will to create a society which was not merely the instrument of power but which rested on moral foundations, which protected the rights of the

⁷²Schlesinger, 55.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 61.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 61; Cf. *JON*, 58.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 61; Cf. *JON*, 63.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 62.

weak against the privileges of the strong and the freedom of the individual against the unlimited authority of the state itself.⁷⁷

For Schlesinger, the logic follows that Dawson changed from a predominantly abstract and negative view of the liberal tradition before the Second World War to a more nuanced and indeed positive view of the essence of liberalism and democracy during and after the war. From a political standpoint, Schlesinger concluded:

In contrast to his earlier views, where he saw in democracy an enemy of Christianity, allied to false liberalism, Dawson now believes in the Christian origin of democracy. Dawson emerges as an adherent to 'Christian Democracy,' as it is represented in our day by Don Sturzo, Maritain, and others. These men believe that democracy is ultimately based upon the spiritual values of Christianity, that, as Maritain put it, the 'democratic impulse' represents a 'temporal manifestation of the inspiration of the gospel.'⁷⁸

The thesis of Jonathon Reyes stands in stark contrast to that of Schlesinger. Reyes confidently asserts that 'Dawson never changed his mind on [political] issues' and that he did not, during the war, come to a more favourable opinion of democracy.⁷⁹ Reyes proceeds to explain that this 'radical rupture thesis' – Schlesinger's for example – is 'taken for granted in almost every work that takes Dawson's political thought seriously.'⁸⁰ To give strength to his point Reyes provides the titles of several works, including Tom Buchanan's article in *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918-1965* and Patrick Allitt's book *Catholic Converts*, as examples of authors who dismiss the notion that Dawson changed his mind.⁸¹

⁷⁷ JON, 56 as quoted in Schlesinger, 63.

⁷⁸ Schlesinger, 'Political Crisis,' 65 quoting Jacques Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy* (New York: Scribner's, 1944), 58.

⁷⁹ Reyes, 117, 39.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 40(fn).

⁸¹ See Buchanan, 'Great Britain' in Tom Buchanan and Martin Conway (eds.) *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918-1965* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 270; Patrick Allitt, *Catholic*

Buchanan's article, however, only mentioned Dawson's name once, and it was in the context of his involvement with the 'Sword.' Allitt devotes more attention to Dawson's political views but the page-long summary of Dawson's intense fear of State control only scratches the surface of his political convictions. Both references can hardly be described as works which seriously consider Dawson's political perspective. Moreover, Reyes, quoting Dawson, claims that 'democracy, *even at its best*, was merely a stepping stone on the "path of secularization."'”⁸² Reyes' observations, however, lack substantiating evidence and consequently are not convincing as explanations for the variations between Dawson's pre-World War Two books and *The Judgement of the Nations*.

Schlesinger's observations about Dawson's changed attitude were, for the most part, correct.⁸³ There is a significant amount of evidence supporting the notion that Dawson spoke very differently of liberalism, democracy, and even nationalism during the war.⁸⁴ Yet Schlesinger's analysis gives the impression that the changes to Dawson's views were more fundamental than they actually were. If

Converts (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 269. Reyes also uses several other authors as proof: Phillippe Chenaux, *Une Europe Vaticane?* (Louvain: Ciaco, 1990); Cushing, 'Cultural Morphology,' and Scott, *Historian*. The latter, Reyes writes, 'denies this rupture and in a recent article defends her father from 'ultra conservatives' in America who would associated Dawson with radical anti-socialism and 'the type of Catholic who held and still holds that any utterance from the teaching authority is valid perpetuity.' Reyes, 40 quoting Christina Scott, 'Hijack of a Historian,' *Tablet* (7 October 1989).

⁸² Reyes, 'Christian Culture,' 120; emphasis mine.

⁸³ The exception to this is that Schlesinger's thesis exaggerated Dawson's affinity with Fascism before the war. Clearly, Reyes' reason for dismissal of Schlesinger's thesis is completely based on the refutation of this exaggeration. Through the exaggerated claims of both dissertations, important nuances in Dawson's thesis are overlooked.

⁸⁴ Perhaps the most obvious example besides the actual thesis of the book was the advertisement on the back cover of the book to buy war bonds. It reads: 'Nations die of a slackening in their citizens' love of them. The test of love is willing sacrifice. Men are so oddly constructed that small sacrifices can be made less willingly than large. The nation asks men to give their lives, and the answer is an instantaneous Yes. The nation asks men to lend their money, and the answer ought to be something quicker than instantaneous and more affirmative than Yes. BUY WAR BONDS.'

there was one issue about which he certainly did change his tone, it was in his belief that liberalism, in its *laissez-faire* nineteenth-century expression, was dead. While still maintaining that liberalism in its economic and political forms had indeed crumbled under the pressure of the 'new conditions,' he expressed his hope that the Christian elements, such as the notion of the natural law, that gave rise to liberal ideals of personal freedom, could be renewed through a revivification of its Christian elements. 'History shows that though *permanent elements* in a culture like the liberal tradition in Europe may be temporarily submerged or forcibly suppressed,' he wrote, 'they inevitably reassert themselves sooner or later often in a new and unexpected way.'⁸⁵ Following the example of Mannheim, Dawson believed that the liberal tradition could only survive if it was liberated from its close association with capitalism. Moreover, Dawson continued to be critical of democracy as it was understood by his contemporaries. This was clearest when he stressed that 'the allies must ... realize that when we say we are fighting for democracy, we are not fighting merely for certain political institutions or even political principles. Still less are we fighting for the squalid prosperity of modern industrialism What we have to defend is, to quote Cardinal Liénart's words, "a human and Christian civilization, built with infinite patience: a work to which many different races and peoples and schools of thought have contributed century after century."'⁸⁶ Democracy, then, had to be reformed and strengthened by means other than political action and social reforms.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ *JON*, 71; emphasis mine.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸⁷ As in earlier works, Dawson noted that the status quo of democracy did not guarantee greater freedom, nor did an allied victory necessarily mean that individual liberties would be secure. Only by returning to the ethical and moral principles of the natural law could the nations of Europe provide order for their citizens. He believed, of course, that the Catholic tradition retained spiritual authority, and therefore was *the* authority to which the nations would find the needed

During the war, Dawson continued to promote corporativism as a solution to what he saw as totalitarian developments in the democratic nations, yet he clearly adapted his official position about democracy and liberalism by evaluating them according to the political realities of the Second World War. Rather than being the enemies of the authority of the Church, democracy and liberalism were described as essentially positive ideologies because of their origins in the Christian tradition. Although in their secularized forms, they still could be considered systems contrary to the teachings of the Church, he believed they could be reclaimed and reinvigorated through an acknowledgement of their origins in the natural law. Only through this reconsideration and acceptance of the natural law could the democratic nations maintain their ideals of the liberty of the individual and religious freedom in the face of all forms of totalitarianism. Thus, while this change in emphasis should not be regarded as a fundamental change in his opinion *per se*, it may be understood as a clarification and revision of his perspective which, if not interpreted within the greater context of his career, does appear to be inconsistent with his commentary before the war. The Second World War, then, is a period during which occurs the beginnings of significant changes in approach in both theory and application of this theory towards the renewal of Christian culture in the West. In the mean time, however, the Sword of the Spirit Movement was, by 1942, running into serious difficulty.

catalyst for a lasting peace. Quoting Pius XII, Dawson had the hope that such a return to the natural law would 'lead the nations back from the broken cisterns of material and selfish to the living fountain of divine justice.' *JON*, 56.

Fragmentation

Ironically, the progress of the Sword movement had been impeded by an inability to achieve unity among those involved. When Hinsley left Rome to return to England in 1939, Pius XII had charged him to 'take to the Catholics of England this message which I have urged on the French: "*Avant tout, l'unité; après tout, l'unité; partout, l'unité; en tout cas, l'unité; à tout prix, l'unité.*"'⁸⁸ The Pope had certainly encouraged unity, Hinsley was promoting unity, and Dawson and the members of the 'Sword' saw national unity, as well as unity among their fellow Catholics, as their primary goals. Yet in spite of all the movement's rhetoric promoting unity among Catholics, the lay leadership responsible for the organization of the movement could not achieve it among themselves. The executive committee, Moloney noted, suffered from an inability to agree both personally and professionally: 'The leaders of the movement, eclectic individuals for the most part, found mutual cooperation difficult and, in some cases, impossible.'⁸⁹ Moloney's observations are based on a series of letters between the writer A.C.F. Beales and Hinsley. Even a letter from Dawson to Hinsley confirms Moloney's observations. Generally speaking, the hierarchy which deprived the

⁸⁸Pope Pius XII quoted by Cardinal Hinsley in the 'Sword' Bulletin no. 2, 4.

⁸⁹Moloney, *Westminster*, 191.

movement of some of its effectiveness by their 'conspicuous lack of interest' eventually turned openly hostile to the movement once it began to encourage unity with those outside the Catholic Church.⁹⁰

At least one review – and arguably the most important review of *The Judgement of the Nations* – reveals the attitude of many members of the hierarchy to the ecumenical hopes of people such as Dawson. The article was written by his fellow Catholic Fr. Andrew Beck and was printed in *The Clergy Review*. Beck shared neither the optimism nor the applause of the majority of the other reviews.⁹¹ Although he had praise for Dawson as a writer and intellectual, Beck was uneasy with Dawson's downplaying of theological differences in favour of a sociological interpretation of the disunity within Christendom. Beck also belittled the cause of Christian unity and called upon Dawson to explain to what extent unity could be achieved, given important distinctions between the Catholic Church and Protestants: 'Have we any other common sacraments with non-Catholics, except the sacrament of Matrimony? And what of "common" forms of worship? The only adequate form of worship under the New Law is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Can that in any way be called 'common' to Catholics and non-Catholics?'⁹² Beck contended, in contrast with Dawson's views, that 'only the spread of the Catholic leaven will save society. But this is not quite what Mr. Dawson seems to urge.'⁹³ Finally, Beck attempted to undermine Dawson's sociological interpretation as a basis for unity by stating:

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁹¹ Andrew Beck, 'Review of Judgement of the Nations', *Clergy Review*, 24, no.3 (March 1944): 97-108.

⁹² Beck, 106.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 106.

It is possible that the present age is more favourable to unity, and that much can be done by emphasizing the permanent value and the sane attractiveness of Catholic social principles. The unity we Catholics must work for above all is a unity of faith in the acceptance of the divine authority of the Church, not merely as a vehicle of social regeneration, as the tradition of a culture, but as the voice of Christ, living, speaking and commanding today with the same power and authority as in the days of his human life on earth. The destiny of humanity is not bound necessarily to any merely natural cultural order; but it is bound, inevitably, to the supernatural order, whose guardian and vehicle on earth is the Catholic Church.⁹⁴

The conservative scepticism of the future Catholic bishop is consistent with a tendency among Catholic intellectuals in general to reject Dawson's historical and sociological approach rather than a Thomist, metaphysical approach to the problem of unity. Beck's criticism was only one of many developments that threatened Dawson's optimistic thesis for a return to unity. Clearly, the hierarchy shared the future bishop's observations and concerns.

By 1942 the bishops broke their silence and shared their concern about the direction of the movement, and thus limited sanctioned involvement with the movement. The bishop of Southwark, Dr. Peter Amigo, was quick to condemn what he felt was a compromise to the Catholic Church's authority when he was approached by the Bishop of Chichester, George Bell, for his blessing to hold cooperative meetings with Protestants. According to Christina Scott, 'Amigo replied that as the Catholic Church alone had divine authority to define what Christian principles were, he feared that "in a joint gathering opinions would probably be expressed, with which we could not agree, but which by our presence we should appear to countenance."' ⁹⁵ Amigo concluded the letter with an unwavering qualification: 'The Catholic Church cannot consent to be grouped with

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁹⁵ Scott, *Historian*, 144.

other bodies as “one of the churches.””⁹⁶ Before too much of the burden for the failure of the movement is placed on the English Catholic hierarchy, however, it should also be said that Rome itself was critical of the movement, a factor which quite possibly played a role in Hinsley’s resignation as its leader.⁹⁷

If the hierarchy, as well as many of the Catholics involved with the movement, stifled its aims by a restrained approach to unity, an equal number of Protestant members fostered this reaction by downplaying the need for a theological basis as the *raison d’être* for the movement. The divisions were especially hard on Hinsley, who had envisioned these differences as surmountable in the struggle for unity in a time of national crisis. ‘Dawson was even more downcast,’ Moloney noted, ‘and deplored the attitude of the theologians as giving scandal rather than avoiding it; the “Sword” seemed to be degenerating into a “sort of Better Britain movement which could be done better under purely secular auspices.”’ Indeed, ““a secular Sword of the Spirit is a contradiction in terms.””⁹⁸ In the end, Hinsley’s resignation was the catalyst for the decline of Dawson’s influence in the movement.

In order to save the movement, it was proposed to divide it into two ‘wings.’ Such a development, however, questioned the validity of the movement’s ecumenism, and was discouraged by members of the Executive Committee, including Dawson. Thus, as unity became less of an ideal and more of a debatable theoretical concept, the movement began to fracture. In the relatively short span of

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 144.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 145. Scott makes this claim: ‘In all probability what caused [Hinsley’s] resignation was a directive the Cardinal received from Rome that only Roman Catholics could be full members’, although I have yet to find direct evidence for this claim. Hinsley gave illness as the reason for his resignation.

⁹⁸Moloney, 200. Dawson to Hinsley, 4 November 1941, as quoted in Moloney, 200.

two years, then, the spirit of optimism that had characterized the movement was failing.

Before his death in 1943, Hinsley knew that the movement was foundering and that it would eventually stray from the ideals on which it was founded. In the months that followed, Dawson was marginalized in his roles as vice-president and intellectual leader of the movement. Although the forces of division within the 'Spirit' were at play before 1943, Hinsley's death sounded its death toll as it was originally conceived. 'Hinsley, as a cardinal and archbishop,' Reyes correctly observes,

brought legitimacy to the Sword of the Spirit, especially to its ecumenical pursuits; when he died, the movement lost its champion in an otherwise hostile hierarchy and, consequently, began to decline. Hinsley was the primary supporter of Dawson's leadership; after Hinsley's death, Dawson was slowly estranged from the leadership, and his vision for the movement was eventually set aside for another. The Sword, as originally conceived, essentially died with the archbishop who founded it.⁹⁹

In an attempt to highlight the positive points of the movement, Moloney observed:

it was no mean achievement to have confronted Lambeth Palace with the unacceptable face of spiritual enthusiasm, to have presented the exiled political groups of western and central Europe with an exciting glimpse of what might have inspired a Catholic federal organisation, and to have shocked some of his fellow bishops into the belief that the venerable elderly Yorkshireman in Archbishop's House was preparing to interpret English Catholicism in terms undreamed of for four centuries. The 'Sword of the Spirit' was born in 1940, and in a sense it finished there, for it was a phenomenon which could flourish only in the extraordinary and unrepeatable atmosphere of that year.¹⁰⁰

Dawson's good relationship with the ambitious and paternal Cardinal Hinsley was undoubtedly the catalyst leading to this optimistic phase of Dawson's career. Under the guidance of Hinsley, Dawson received a renewed sense of

⁹⁹Reyes, 311.

¹⁰⁰Moloney, 204. Moloney continued by correctly arguing that 'as the major interdenominational nucleating force of its generation the 'Sword of the Spirit' must be measured not by its later struggles, in so many areas, merely to exist, but by the very fact that it came to birth. Therein lay Arthur Hinsley's justification, and therein lay the movement's glory.' (204)

purpose and hope for the renewal of Christian culture in western civilization. In spite of the dire position of Britain and Europe in the 'hour of darkness,' there was an optimism that had been absent in his earlier writings, not only from the sociological prospect of cultural renewal that had characterized his pre-Second World War books but also from a more intense theological hope in the redemptive action of God in history. He had understood this theological principle before the war, yet as a central principle, during the war, it permeated his perspective as expressed most clearly in *The Judgement of the Nations*.

One must be careful, however, not to exaggerate the changes in Dawson's outlook. That Dawson underwent a 'Copernican revolution' during the war is most unlikely. His primary ambition -- and ultimately the lens through which all his viewpoints must be understood -- was the reassertion of the Christian elements in the political, economic, and cultural fabric of Western society. Both liberalism and democracy, according to Dawson, would not have been conceived had it not been for the eschatological and moral idealism of the Christian tradition. It was possible, then, for the sake of national unity and the cause of Christian cooperation to adjust his perspective in order to emphasize the moral basis of the liberal tradition over the more spurious aspects of liberalism in its modern form. The threat of cultural totalitarianism remained, and unless liberal ideals found a religious basis and authority, individual liberty was still threatened by the economic machinery of the state. In his conviction and warning of this trend, Dawson was completely consistent.

Had Dawson, in *Religion and the Modern State*, elaborated on his position that he 'did not mean to say that [Communism in Russia, National Socialism in Germany, and Capitalism and Liberal Democracy in the Western countries] are all absolutely equivalent, and that we have no right to prefer one to another,' rather

than continually announcing the death of liberalism, the positive possibilities in fascism, and the fundamental evils of democracy, the supposed 'change' in his thought would not likely appear so abrupt. Ultimately the confusion surrounding his political views between 1935 and 1942 is the result of ambiguous terminology, as well as a lack of a definite political expression in which to place his vision, both of which were noticed by the majority of reviewers writing between these years.

In spite of the prestige he enjoyed as Vice-President of the 'Sword of the Spirit' movement and in his successful editorship of *The Dublin Review*, the final years of the Second World War were, for Dawson, filled with personal and professional disappointment with the short-sightedness of many of his fellow English Catholics. Rather than being the means to a new era of Christian unity, the 'Sword' could only heighten the already insurmountable differences between Catholics and Protestants in England. Near the end of 1944, Dawson's influence faced another setback, this time at the hands of Douglas Jerrold, the chairman of *The Dublin Review's* publisher, Burns and Oates. In what Christina Scott called a 'surreptitious move,' Jerrold removed Dawson from the editorship of the journal because he 'published articles by Maritain and Bernanos, both of whom had supported the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War.'¹⁰¹ Jerrold had ardently championed Franco, chartering the plane for the Nationalist leader for his return from Majorca to the Spanish mainland in order to overthrow the Republican government.¹⁰² Before the war, Dawson had supported Franco as well, but his openness to the publication of articles by left-leaning intellectuals did not sit well with Jerrold.

¹⁰¹ Scott, 'Vision and Legacy of Christopher Dawson', 19.

¹⁰² Allitt, 223. See also Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (New York: Harper, 1961).

Dawson's estrangement from the 'Sword' and from *The Dublin Review* did not signify the end of his influence in England, even if it did indicate its waning.¹⁰³ He was still a popular writer and journals such as *Month*, *Catholic Mind*, *Catholic Herald*, *Blackfriars*, and *The Catholic Herald* continued to publish his articles for English readers.¹⁰⁴ His experiences nevertheless caused him to expand his vision and look to other means to restore those 'lost elements' of western civilization, most notably through the means of education.

¹⁰³ Dawson had no other dealings with what became of the 'Sword' and he did not publish any more articles in *The Dublin Review* until five years later.

¹⁰⁴ Before his resignation from *The Dublin Review*, Dawson wrote almost exclusively for the journal between 1941 and 1944, writing 12 articles over this four-year period. In 1945 he wrote for the other journals mentioned above. These articles include: 'Foundations of European Order', *Catholic Mind*, no. 42 (1944): 313-316; 'Democracy and the Party System', *Month*, no. 181 (1945): 127-133; 'Parties, Politics and Peace', *Catholic Mind*, no. 43 (1945): 372-373; 'Europe, a Society of Peoples', *Month*, no. 181 (1945): 309-316; 'Left-Right Fallacy', *Catholic Herald*, Nov. 9th, 1945; 'Yogi and the Commissar', *Blackfriars*, no. 25 (1945): 361-365.

Part Six

A New Vision 1945-1952

Education and Reconstruction

The years following the Second World War saw the expansion of an already growing readership of Dawson's books. Anne Munro-Kerr, a member of the Foreign Affairs Department of Dawson's literary agent, the Society of Authors, was able to get his books published in almost every European language. Catholics on the Continent were already familiar with them from his publications in *Order* and his role in 'The Sword of the Spirit Movement,' but this new initiative most certainly would have made his ideas more accessible to a greater number of people. Not only did his readership continue to expand in Europe, but in North America as well, through the efforts of Sheed and Ward's office in New York City. Their labour was rewarded, for although Dawson had never set foot on American soil, by the early 1950s he had there gained many faithful readers, especially in a majority of American Catholic colleges and universities. In contrast to this expansion on the continent and in North America, his audience in England was declining, which led Scott to admit that 'his work became better known on the continent and in the New World than in his own country.'¹ 'Eventually', she

¹Scott, *Historian*, 161.

concluded, 'more visitors to Boars Hill came from abroad than from Oxford itself.'²

In the years following the Second World War, Dawson, like many of his contemporaries, became preoccupied with the reconstruction of a world torn from its stable foundations on the old order. In 1945, Dawson was invited to be an active participant in the National Peace Council; he wrote an article with Malcolm Spencer for its periodical, 'Peace Aims Pamphlets.'³ Other articles written during the period reflect pre-war themes and discussed the future of political parties, unity in Europe, and some practical initiatives for achieving peace aims that had not been attained after the First World War. Yet, the period also saw a more original trend develop in his reflections on the reconstruction of Europe and its Christian culture: education as a means to future peace and order.

In 1944, Dawson was invited to give a paper at the Edward Alleyn Lectures in Dulwich at Christ's Chapel of Alleyn's College of God's Gift. The aim of the lectures was to help clarify the 'widespread feeling that our modern civilization is in a critical condition, and that this condition has something to do with what has happened to the religious forces which have helped to mould our Western European culture.'⁴ In what was to become the first of his articles on education, Dawson wrote about the 'disastrous' role state education has played in the secularization of the West and how both the content and methods of the

²*Ibid.*, 161.

³Christopher Dawson, 'The Two Currents in the Modern Democratic Tradition,' *Democracy and Peace* in collaboration with Malcolm Spencer, *Peace Aims Pamphlets*, no. 30, London: National Peace Council.

⁴V. A. Demant, Preface to *Our Culture: Its Christian Roots and Present Crisis* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1947), v.

'educationalists' must change if education is to play a positive role in the reconstruction effort.

Admitting a high level of affinity with the Duke of Wellington's warning to keep religion at the centre of education lest it merely create 'so many clever devils,' Dawson wrote, 'We see today what a mess these clever devils have made of our world.'⁵ In his cool and critical analysis of universal education and his stern condemnation of its 'utilitarian character,' he appeared to unleash four decades of contempt for his own experiences in education, the 'little devils' perhaps older versions of the 'savages' he had encountered at Bilton Grange. He went on to point out that the problems in education were fundamentally systemic and rooted in a more general trend of secularization of Western culture when the old humanist 'hierarchy of Divinity, Humanity, and Natural Science' was displaced from the centre of education by the liberal vision for an educated and enlightened majority. Moreover, although Dawson's turn to education as the means to renewal itself places his recommendations in a classic liberal spirit, he attempted to turn Locke and Mill on their heads, downplaying the notion that education itself creates a better society. He wrote:

I do not think our civilization will be saved ... by the quantitative progress of education on the existing lines: that is to say, by more education given to more people for longer and longer periods. Indeed, the extension of public education – that is to say, the attempt of a single uniform educational system to mould the whole mind of the whole community by a single all-embracing educational system – only increases the mass-mindedness of modern society without raising its cultural standards or deepening its spiritual life.⁶

As in the decade before the onset of the Second World War, Dawson was fearful of the totalitarian trend sweeping democratic countries. He assumed, and

⁵ Christopher Dawson, 'The Crisis of Christian Culture: Education', in Demant (ed.), *Our Culture*, 35.

⁶ Dawson, 'The Crisis of Christian Culture: Education,' 36.

correctly so, that there would be a renewed place for education as a means to economic expansion in the non-Western countries and reconstruction in West, both of which were fuelled by the need for economic recovery in the post-war boom. If such events occurred, the possibilities for cultural renewal existed; but so too did the opportunity for a liberty-denying uniformity that he believed often coexists with universal education. The only way to avoid this, he argued, was for the West to 'retrace [its] steps, to see what [was] lost in two centuries of economic progress and world conquest, and to consider how [it] can recover contact with the essential realities on which the existence of [the] civilization depends.'⁷

'The Crisis of Christian Culture: Education' was merely an introduction to more extensive articles through which he analysed the role of education in the past and future of the West, making the recommendations in this short lecture sketchy and underdeveloped.⁸ In spite of this, his hope was clear: 'However secularized our modern civilization may become,' he wrote, 'this sacred tradition remains like a river in the desert, and a genuine religious education can still use it to irrigate the thirsty lands and to change the face of the world with the promise of a new life.'⁹ Dawson's vision was by no means an uncomplicated one, especially given that fact that it faced a 'great obstacle' created by the 'failure of Christians themselves to understand the depth of that tradition and the inexhaustible possibilities of new life it contains.'¹⁰ If there was to be a renewal of Christian education in the West, he

⁷*Ibid.*, 37.

⁸ A consideration of his philosophy of education and his recommendations will be discussed at greater lengths in the following chapter.

⁹ Dawson, 'Crisis of Christian Culture: Education,' 49.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 49.

believed it had to be initiated by Christian educators and people of faith.¹¹ The Utilitarian philosophy of education, as seen in the likes of Jeremy Bentham, he argued, led to a 'sacrifice of the humanities to science and technology' and therefore made knowledge slave to the needs of 'economic and political interest.'¹² The element of faith at the centre of Christian culture could bring a unity to knowledge and inquiry, and reverse the philistinism of 'highbrow' utilitarian education. Ironically, in an attempt to make education more 'universal' – that is to say more general in its focus rather than specialized – Dawson believed that religious education could make educational aims more democratic, for it is 'the mystery of faith [that brings] all men together at the heart of life, and it reduces the differences of culture, in the humanist sense of the word, to comparative insignificance.'¹³

The passion for the possibilities that existed in education expressed in this first article never abated and in the years that followed, Dawson became 'absorbed with the idea of introducing the study of Christian culture into higher education.'¹⁴ This development in his thought is clearly evident in his post-war publications. Before his lecture for the Alleyn series, Dawson had not devoted a single article to reforms in education, even if he did see his articles and books as important educational tools to the same end. Comparatively, he published eleven works between 1945 and 1955 and seventeen in total before his retirement in 1962.¹⁵ It

¹¹*Ibid.*, 47.

¹²*Ibid.*, 48.

¹³*Ibid.*, 48-49. Cf. Christopher Dawson, Introduction to *The Catholic Church and Education*, by M. O'Leary (London: The Catholic Book Club, 1946), vii-x.

¹⁴Scott, *Historian*, 161.

¹⁵These works include: 'Education and the Crisis of Christian Culture,' *Lumen Vitae*, no. 1 (1946): 204-214; Introduction to *The Catholic Church and Education*, by M. O'Leary (London:

would only be a matter of time before he was able to contribute to this task of cultural renewal through education. Indeed, the post-war concern with education provided a momentous opportunity to initiate some of his vision for the renewal of Christian culture by educating students in the Christian elements of the Western intellectual inheritance.

The Catholic Book Club, 1946): vii-x; 'The Task of Christian Education', *Catholic World*, no. 165 (October 10th, 1947): 463-464; 'Study of Christian Culture as a Means of Education', *Lumen Vitae*, no. 5 (1950): 171-186; 'Education and Christian Culture', *Commonweal*, no. 59 (1953): 216-220; 'Education and the Study of Christian Culture', *Studies*, no. 42, (1953): 293-302; 'Education and Christian Culture', *Commonweal*, no. 59, (1953): 526-527; 'Education and Christian Culture', *Commonweal*, no. 60 (1954): 138-139; 'Today's Challenge to U. S. Colleges', *America*, no. 99, (1954): 537-538; 'Education and Christian Culture', *Commonweal*, no. 61 (1955): 678; 'Christian Culture in General Education', *America*, no. 93 (1955): 63-65; 'Study of Christian Culture in the American College', *Catholic World*, no. 183 (1956): 197-201; 'Education and the State', *Commonweal*, no. 65 (1957): 427-429; 'Universities, Ancient and Modern', *Catholic Educational Review*, no. 56 (1957): 27-31; 'American Education and Christian Culture', *American Benedictine Review*, no. 9, (1958): 7-16; 'Interview on Church, State and Religious Education in America', *Jubilee*, no. 8 (1961): 27. He also wrote *The Crisis of Western Education* in 1961.

The First Gifford Series: *Religion and Culture* (1948)

In a letter dated 12 March 1945, Professor John Baillie of the University of Edinburgh notified Dawson that he had been chosen to be Gifford Lecturer for 1946 and 1947. The Gifford Lectures were and continue to be among the most coveted theological lectureships in Britain, and also among the most conservative. The endowment was conceived, as stated in its terms, for 'promoting, advancing, teaching and diffusing the study of Natural Theology in the widest sense of that term, in other words, the Knowledge of God, the Infinite, the All, the First and Only Cause, the One and Sole Substance, the Sole Being and Sole Reality, and the Sole Existence, the Knowledge of His Nature and Attributes, the Knowledge of the Foundation of Ethics or Morals, and of All Obligations and Duties thence arising'¹⁶ After several difficult years, the prestige of the Gifford Lectureship was a welcome opportunity for Dawson, even if he did accept the offer with some reservation.¹⁷

¹⁶ Taken from the 'Deed of Foundation', partially quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 152.

¹⁷ According to Scott, it was rumoured that the Bishop of Chichester, Dr. Bell had recommended him for the position.

Dawson's reservations were rooted in his insecurity with the subject matter. His unfamiliarity with current research in areas such as Natural Theology and philosophy, not to mention the general intellectual currents in the universities, made him feel 'out of touch' and unable to 'recover contact.'¹⁸ It was for this reason that, according to Scott, a 'sudden fit of despondency seemed to overtake him' which ultimately led him to conclude that he was unable to deliver them the next year. In a letter written to Baillie on 7 June 1946, Dawson claimed that both ill health and anxiety concerning his ability to grasp the subject matter had compounded his earlier insecurities.¹⁹ After receiving Dawson's official letter of resignation, Baillie reassured him in his reply that his plan to lecture on themes relating to history rather than theology or philosophy would actually be more desirable. With this reassurance, Dawson continued writing his lectures for the following term with a new confidence.

If Dawson felt unable to complete the lectures, his fears were well grounded. His preoccupation with commentary on political issues and his efforts in the 'Sword' had taken him away from much of the current research in the areas he planned to discuss. Almost a decade and a half had passed since *Enquiries into Religion and Culture* (1933), a considerable expanse of time given the rapid growth in historical and sociological studies. Whatever liabilities had been created by his absence from the research, he delivered his first series of lectures in Martin Hall at New College, Edinburgh throughout April and May of 1947. The lectures

¹⁸Christopher Dawson to John Baillie, June 7, 1946 published in Scott, *Historian*, 153.

¹⁹The letter, in its entirety, has been published in Scott's book. See Scott, *Historian*, 153.

were highly successful and the proceedings were published a year later by Sheed and Ward under the same title of the lecture series itself, *Religion and Culture*.²⁰

In *Religion and Culture*, Dawson revisited his much discussed thesis that transcendent and supernatural forces have been the engine for cultural development from the most fundamental aspects of the individual and family to the highest expressions of social order.²¹ Through a brief survey of the history of humanism, an analysis of the role Natural Theology plays in philosophy, and a comparative study of world religions and their common elements, he attempted to demonstrate the centrality of humanity's religious experience to the formation of culture throughout history. For those familiar with his earliest articles for *The Sociological Review* and his book *The Age of the Gods*, this thesis was not new. In comparison to these earlier publications and their actual explanation of the relationship between religion and culture, however, *Religion and Culture* proved to be a much more profound analysis of religious experience, psychology, and comparative religion.

Dawson opens the book with a description of the intellectual developments since the Enlightenment which initiated a thawing of the West's approach to epistemologies outside the realm of rationalism. Ironically, both the reactionary philosophy of nineteenth-century irrationalist philosophers such as Nietzsche, Bergson, and to a lesser extent Schopenhauer, and its psychological offspring found in the scientific studies of Freud and Jung, opened the door for a reconsideration of the nature of religious belief and reality beyond a strict and

²⁰ Christopher Dawson, *Religion and Culture* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1948), hereafter RC.

²¹ Some reviews of *Religion and Culture* include: H. F. Kearney, *Cambridge Review*; Waldemar Gurlan, *Commonweal*, (3 June 1949); Keith Guthrie, *The Spectator*, Friday, 10 December 1948; Hugh Bihler S. J., *America*, (26 March 1949); *Times Literary Supplement* 19 March 1949; *The Daily Telegraph* March, 1949; *Times of Ceylon*, 17 August, 1957.

unwavering empiricism. Parallelling these movements in philosophy and psychology was a renewed interest in the study of comparative religion by intellectuals such as Joseph de Maistre, Friedrich von Schlegel, Creuzer, Baur, Schelling, and Tylor to name only a few. The movements, Dawson claimed, created a new atmosphere in which the 'abstract *a priori* constructions of eighteenth-century rationalism faded before the rich and complex realities of man's actual religious experience.'²² Unfortunately the renewed interest in the historical contribution of religious belief, he continued, was hijacked in the idealist environment of the nineteenth century by philosophers such as Hegel who reduced world religions and world epochs to ambiguous and ultimately unscientific stages in the progressive self-revelation of the Absolute Spirit.²³ Yet the value of the study of comparative religion was embraced by the positivist school and, in spite of its critics, became a respected discipline in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Although the attempt to connect the irrational elements of the human psyche with religious phenomena could in no way be empirically demonstrated, what could be both exhibited and accepted is that religion and religious belief shape and direct conscious reality. With his fellow Catholic Arnold Lunn, Dawson believed that William James, the American pragmatist and previous holder of the Gifford Chair, had done much to construct an exemplary case for this argument.²⁴

Quoting James, Dawson wrote:

The recesses of feeling, the darker, blinder strata of character are the only places in the world in which we catch real fact in the making. It is where the further limits of our being plunge in to an altogether other dimension

²² RC, 14.

²³ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁴ See Allitt, 201.

of existence from the sensible and merely understandable world that religion has its origin, and the spiritual forces that originate in this region have a real and transforming effect on human life and social culture.²⁵

In spite of these notions, Dawson was under no illusions. He accepted the possibility that the now-legitimate study of the unconscious and its effects on the conscious world could not legitimize the notion of the positive elements of religious belief: '[There can be] no doubt,' he wrote, that 'psychology has provided new and easily manipulated weapons for the rationalist who sees religion as the result of a delusional process of projection which can be liquidated by scientific methods of analysis.'²⁶ Indeed, Freud himself dismissed religion as a form of psychosis. What the new studies did suggest, however, was the efficacious influence of religion on society, even if in the empirical atmosphere of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it had ceased to play a unifying role.²⁷ With Durkheim and Jung, Dawson concluded that 'the deeper men look into the hidden life of the psyche, the more disposed will they be to recognize the reality and creativity of the spiritual forces which manifest themselves in the religious experience of the human race.'²⁸ In Dawson's opinion, one should not conclude that religious experience was purely subjective. 'All the higher religions,' he wrote, 'do in fact assert the existence of a science of divine truth and base their teaching upon it; And it is obvious that if there is not true knowledge of the object of religious experience, religion loses its validity, and even its social coherence, and becomes an irrational impulse like any other delusional form of psychosis.'²⁹

²⁵ RC, 18. See William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: 1902).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

²⁷ Stromberg, 180-181.

²⁸ RC, 19.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

Echoing *The Age of the Gods* and *Progress and Religion*, Dawson believed that through the comparative study of religion and culture, the positive social functions of religion could be demonstrated. For, he concluded,

it is the business of the historical science of religion to show how religion has fulfilled this task: how the vital relation has been maintained between the depths of the Unconscious and the surface of the social order: how religion asserts its internal spiritual autonomy and how it is moulded and conditioned by the influences of environment and social function. It is only when all this has been understood that it is possible to deal with the fundamental problems of Natural Theology: the transcendent element in religious experience and the eternal absolute validity of religious truth. Yet ... it is necessary to make a provisional acceptance of these principles in order to understand religion at all.³⁰

Dawson believed that the efficacy of religion as a positive and unifying force is one of the most unmistakable characteristics about the past experiences of individuals as well as the formation of societies. 'Throughout the greater part of mankind's history,' he wrote, 'in all ages and states of society, religion has been the great central unifying force in culture. It has been the guardian of tradition, the preserver of the moral law, the educator and the teacher of wisdom.'³¹ It is because of the universal character of religious experience that Dawson so strongly agreed with Acton's opinion on the role of religion in history and the 'grand unity in the history of ideas; of conscience, of morality, and of the means securing it.'³² 'In all ages,' Dawson asserted confidently, 'the first creative works of a culture are due to a religious inspiration and dedicated to a religious end.' Thus 'the temples of the gods are the most enduring works of man. Religion stands at the threshold of all

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

³² Cf. *RRWC*, 15. In his second series of Gifford Lectures, Dawson wrote: "Religion is the key of history," said Lord Acton, and to-day, when we realize the tremendous influence of the unconscious on human behaviour and the power of religion to bind and loose these hidden forces, Acton's saying has acquired a wider meaning than he realized.' (p. 15). Acton to Döllinger, Cambridge University Library Add. Mss. 5641 quoted in MacDougall, 'The Later Acton,' 42.

the great literatures of the world. Philosophy is its offspring and is a child which constantly returns to its parent.'³³ The tendency in the modern period to reduce these fundamental experiences of humanity's social history to 'an irrational impulse like any other delusional form of psychosis,' as Freud did, was for Dawson, not an adequate explanation given the findings of comparative religion. Indeed, far from being a negative influence, religious belief has provided a creative impulse and dynamic that has shaped and will continue to shape the human experience and thus society itself.

Renaissance humanism remained the clearest example of the dynamic character of religious belief and its positive effects on the culture of a society. Echoing his thesis in his book *Medieval Religion*, which attempted to revise the notion that Renaissance humanism's distaste for medieval culture did not negate the continuity of the tradition itself, Dawson demonstrated how the inherited belief in Natural Theology from the classics and Christian theology unified the scientific expansion of the early modern period. 'The men of the New Learning,' he wrote, 'could no more dispense with the idea of God than the men of the Old Learning. The more completely the new philosophy and the new science realized their ideal of a rational universe, the more they needed the idea of God as the source and principle of intelligibility.' To illustrate this point, Dawson quoted Descartes who said: 'the certitude and truth of all science depend on knowledge of God and on that alone' for 'the certitude of all other truths is so dependent on this one that without the knowledge of God it would be impossible to know anything else.'³⁴ For Dawson, this balancing of scientific inquiry and theological cognizance was the high water mark of Western intellectual ascension. From this perspective, 'a

³³ RC, 50.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

new historical approach to the study of religion is essential alike for the study of Natural Theology and for the student of human culture.'³⁵

In Dawson's thinking, this 'historical approach' reveals that 'there is a vast body of evidence from all ages and all cultures, from the lowest to the highest, testifying to a universal belief in prophecy. Vision and inspiration are natural to man, not in the sense that every man has them, but because every people believes that there are men who have them and that such men are the chosen vehicles of the highest truth.' The spiritual or religious elements in a society took very concrete forms in the social life of the community. Dawson identified three 'religious organs of society': Prophets and Divination; Priesthood and Sacrifice; and Kingship. Each of these offices plays a vital role in the ordering of a society and the fact that Kings answered to the office of priest and prophet reveals the orienting of the life of the community to higher, transcendent ends. Government, he pointed out, is subject to a higher law.

In comparison to the popular belief that the West had progressed beyond such blending of the religious and the profane, Dawson argued (as he had in *Progress and Religion* and *The Age of the Gods*) that there are no grounds for believing that such stripping away of 'superstitions' in favour of a rational epistemology is progress in itself. In fact, the failure of modern society to create more autonomy for the individual and a perfect society revealed to Dawson that moderns had something to learn from the more 'primitive' social structures and the transcendence that governed their culture. Religion was and should continue to play an important role in the future, even if, as Gerald Russello has noted, many of

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

Dawson's contemporaries envisioned a future in which religion played no part in social, economic, and political discussion.³⁶

Consistent with the religious elements of primitive culture, Western society thrived under the three 'religious elements of society' as the Catholic Church provided social stability to the people of Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire. The monasteries and Churches also became the stewards of knowledge, and the centres of learning through the vast numbers of manuscripts and books they held in store. The religious elements of Western Civilization, then, cannot be ignored, nor can they be dismissed so easily as intellectuals as Voltaire had done more than two hundred years before. The study of the religious elements of Western culture was the subject of Dawson's second series.

³⁶Gerald Russello, 'The Relevance of Christopher Dawson' *First Things* (April 2002): 46.

The Second Gifford Series:
Religion and the Rise of Western Culture (1950)

Dawson's second series in the Gifford Lectures was published as *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*.³⁷ 'How did it come about,' he asked in his introduction, 'that a small group of peoples in Western Europe should in a relatively short space of time acquire the power to transform the world and to emancipate themselves from man's age-long dependence on the forces of nature?'³⁸ The ambition of modern intellectuals has been to explain this unique development in history as a 'manifestation of a universal Law of Progress which governed the universe and led mankind by inevitable stages from apehood to perfection.'³⁹ Such a law, he argued, had been discredited and was no longer an adequate response to the question. Instead one must consider the cultural factors that led to 'the peculiar achievements of Western man.'⁴⁰ The factors which led to these achievements, he concluded, were undoubtedly the result of religion, which

³⁷Some reviews of *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* include: R. T. F. *The Personalist* (Summer 1952): 312; Gerald G. Walsh, *Catholic Historical Review*, (October 1951): 297-98; Philip Burnham, *Commonweal*, 23 June 1950; *The Listener*, 21 September 1950; *British Guiana Chronicle*, 13 October 1950; E. M. T. *San Francisco Chronicle*, 20 August 1950; Robert S. Bosher, *New York Times*, 24 December 1950; *The Daily Telegraph*, 3 February 1950.

³⁸*RRWC*, 15.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 15.

in turn expanded the mind to infinite possibilities for learning and creativity.

Reiterating his thesis from *Religion and Culture*, he noted that 'if ... we study a culture as a whole, we shall find there is an intimate relation between its religious faith and its social achievement.'⁴¹ Any study of western civilization which fails to consider the religious nature of its culture and the positive contributions to its social development is a one-sided analysis. By publishing *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, Dawson hoped to turn the dominantly held understanding of Western development since the Renaissance on its head by highlighting the role religion played in some of the most positive elements of the culture of the West.

Although the conditions under which western civilization developed are similar when compared to other civilizations, Dawson held that there were important differences that needed to be highlighted. Referring to a much earlier article entitled 'Christianity and the New Age,' Dawson repeated his observation that in comparison to the 'unchanging law of social tradition which rules the oriental cultures,' the dynamic nature of Western culture has been a direct result of a 'religious ideal [that] has not been the worship of timeless and changeless perfection, but a spirit that strives to incorporate itself in humanity and to change the world.'⁴² The religious inspiration behind each culture – Western and non-Western – is of equal value according to Dawson, but the progressive nature of history, the realities of cultural interaction, and the accumulation of human knowledge has created Christianity, a higher level of religious and social inspiration that reveals the ultimate meaning of history.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴² *RRWC*, 15. For the original article see Christopher Dawson, 'Christianity and the New Age' (1931): 94-96.

As in *The Making of Europe*, Dawson's purpose for lecturing on the religious elements of Western civilization was to revise long held biases about the Dark Ages. 'Our generation has been forced to realize how fragile and unsubstantial are the barriers that separate civilization from the forces of destruction,' he wrote in the introduction. 'We have learnt that barbarism is not a picturesque myth or a half-forgotten memory of a long-passed stage of history,' he continued, 'but an ugly underlying reality which may erupt with shattering force whenever the moral authority of a civilization loses its control.'⁴³ Dawson believed that after two World Wars, it was impossible to look condescendingly at the Dark Ages. 'We are in a better position,' he wrote,

to appreciate the vital function of religion both as a principle of continuity and conservation and as the source of new spiritual life. In that age religion was the only power that remained unaffected by the collapse of civilization, by the loss of faith in social institutions and cultural traditions and by the loss of hope in life. Wherever genuine religion exists it must always possess this quality, since it is of the essence of religion to bring man into relation with transcendent and eternal realities. Therefore it is natural that the Dark Ages of history – the hour of human failure and impotence – should also be the hour when the power of eternity is manifested. In our own civilization ... it is possible to see something of the creative process at work in the depths of the social consciousness; and however incomplete this knowledge may be, it is of very high value for the study of religion and the student of culture.⁴⁴

The Gifford series, in both its lecture and published forms, was a tremendous success. The *Times Literary Supplement* called *Religion and Culture* 'an important contribution to the examination of one among the crucial problems of our time' and *The Spectator* commended *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* as 'one of the most noteworthy books produced in this generation about the medieval world.' Upon considering the content of both volumes, *The Saturday Review of Literature* heralded Dawson as 'the most exciting writer of [our] day ...'

⁴³ *RRWC*, 24.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

and 'unequalled as a historian of culture.' An equally enthusiastic reviewer for *The Register* exalted Dawson's scholarship over that of Arnold Toynbee and championed him as 'the supreme master of cultural history.' The books gained international fame as the *New York Times* declared that 'it would be difficult to find a volume of comparable scope in which the institutions of medieval life are so brilliantly characterized.'⁴⁵

Not all reviewers were so kind. The future Regius Professor at Oxford, Hugh Trevor-Roper, was not impressed by *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*. Although he praised Dawson as a brilliant scholar and synthesizer, Trevor-Roper questioned Dawson's thesis about Christianity as the vital source which brought Europe out of the Dark Ages. 'What are we to deduce?', he questioned, 'that Christianity alone as a formative religion, can change the world? ... This is Mr. Dawson's conclusion It seems inconceivable that he should draw it, that so learned a scholar should appear, in this one respect, so parochial.'⁴⁶

Trevor-Roper's comments reveal the growing opposition from the post-World War Two generation of historians and philosophers to writers such as Dawson. Indeed, they grew suspicious of the claims of the German historicist schools and the metahistorical views of early twentieth-century historians like Toynbee, Wells, and Dawson, even if there were great differences between their approaches and conclusions. Dawson was well aware of the challenges faced by historians who believed that patterns existed in history, that meaning existed in the historical process, and that one can really know the essence or *zeitgeist* of a period of history. After the publication of *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*,

⁴⁵Taken from the leaf of *Religion and Culture* and *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*.

⁴⁶Hugh Trevor-Roper, review of Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, in *New Statesman*, March 11, 1950, 276-277, as quoted in Allitt, 268.

Dawson wrote several articles to discuss the nature of history and the advantages and disadvantages of metahistory.

Defending Metahistory

The challenge to metahistory that Dawson confronted was part of greater changes in the historical profession. One important change was in methodology and what historians believed was appropriate for establishing a historical fact. Richard Evans explains that the 1950s saw a reassertion of the ideal of historical objectivity which was a sign of a 'reestablishing' of history after several decades of decline as a discipline. The reassertion of historical study in the 1950s paralleled the heightening tension of the cold war, making Marxist historiography and its dialectical laws the *bête noire* of academic history by the 1970s.⁴⁷ In reaction to the Marxist view of history, several historians in the post-Second World War era attempted to tackle and therefore refute the scientific claims of the Marxist interpretation of history. Sir Karl Popper, whom one historian has designated 'the most influential voice in the postwar discussions in [the philosophy of science],' was one of the first to set new rules for what was to be considered scientific and what was to be eliminated as speculation.⁴⁸ In his book *The Poverty of Historicism* (the title's similarity to Marx's book *The Poverty of Philosophy* revealed his

⁴⁷Morrill, 3.

⁴⁸Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 298.

contempt for Marxism) Popper attempted to establish guidelines for what was to be accepted as objective historiography.⁴⁹ Under Popper's epistemology, 'theories ... which accounted for everything, and could be adapted to any circumstances, were merely metaphysical; only theories which did not claim to explain everything, yet which resisted attempts to prove them false, were truly scientific.'⁵⁰ Peter Novick provides some much needed clarification of Popper's use of the term 'historicism.'

He writes:

The historicism against which Popper inveighed was not the German *historismus* which writers in recent decades have translated as 'historicism.' 'Historicism,' in Popper's usage, was a neologism for any theory (ancient, medieval, or modern) which purported to predict the future course of history; of any 'lawlike' historical social science; more broadly, for any social outlook which aspired to more than "piecemeal social engineering."⁵¹

Influential mid-twentieth-century historians such as Namier and H. A. L. Fisher, a former admirer of Dawson's books, had dismissed pattern in history, and saw the future of historiography in smaller, more specialized projects.⁵² Although Dawson did not claim to 'predict' the future *per se*, he did imply that pattern existed in history and that laws of historical development could be demonstrated through a closer relationship between history and the social sciences, a union he had promoted throughout his career. Historians were increasingly challenging this relationship, and the implications of Popper's sceptical and deductive approach as well as the growing distrust of metahistory by academics in favour of a more empirical methodology made historians like Dawson highly suspect.

⁴⁹See Novick, 298n-299n.

⁵⁰Richard Evans, *In Defense of History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 30-31.

⁵¹Novick, 298n-299n.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 29-30.

Although Dawson made no specific reference to Popper, Fisher or Namier, the obvious shift in his selection for themes discussed in his articles shows that he was clearly aware of the directions in which historians and their methods were heading as well as the reaction against metahistory. Between 1950 and 1955, Dawson wrote seven articles which either defended the Christian view of history, defined metahistory or discussed the works of metahistorians such as Toynbee, Marx, and Wells. Even before 1950, he referred to both the benefits and liabilities of the trend towards specialization among historians:

While [the] process of specialization has increased our knowledge of almost every aspect of history, it has had an unfortunate influence on the study with which we are concerned [⁵³], since it has tended to separate and divide the elements that we have to unite and bring together.⁵⁴

In Dawson's opinion, specialization, while informative, tends to compartmentalize knowledge and, in the process, creates various levels of priority upon knowledge, priorities which are all too often dictated by ideological and political interests. Historiography then becomes a source for division rather than a basis for the unity of knowledge. For Dawson, the past was so interconnected that one area could not be understood without reference to another. His long held frustration about the marginalization of church history from general history was the clearest example of the liabilities as well as his personal frustration with the trend towards specialization. On this subject, he wrote:

On the one side, the scientific historian has concentrated his researches on the criticism of sources and documents; on the other, the student of Christianity has devoted himself to the history of dogma and ecclesiastical institutions, with the result that we have a number of highly developed separate studies – political history, constitutional history, and economic history, on the one side, and ecclesiastical history, the history of dogma, and liturgiology on the other.⁵⁵

⁵³Dawson is referring to *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*.

⁵⁴*RRWC*, 12.

⁵⁵*RRWC*, 12-13.

Nevertheless, it was the related but more philosophical reaction against metahistory that most concerned Dawson in 1951 when he contributed to the debate by writing two articles for the newly founded journal, *History Today*. The first and most important was a small essay entitled 'The Problem of Metahistory: the Nature and Meaning of History and the Cause and Significance of Historical Change.'⁵⁶ Dawson wrote the article in order to achieve two aims. The first was to clarify the meaning of metahistory, as it was (and continues to be) a relatively opaque term. The second was to analyse the criticisms levelled against metahistory and to separate what he felt were legitimate problems with the methodological approach from what could be accepted, unavoidable, and even appreciated in metahistory.

In an attempt to provide much needed clarification of a difficult concept he wrote,

I take it that the term was coined on the analogy of Metaphysics which is itself by no means an easy word to define. When Aristotle had written his books on physics, he proceeded to discuss the ultimate concepts that underlie his physical theories: the nature of matter, the nature of being and the cause of motion and change. In the same way Metahistory is concerned with the nature of history, the meaning of history and the cause and significance of historical change.⁵⁷

For Dawson, metahistory is a higher form of historiography which, through a relationship with philosophy and the social sciences, attempts to provide a greater understanding of the historical process. It uses the purely historical fact-finding research of modern historical research and blends it with philosophical reflection to deepen the understanding of the historical process. 'If an age has strong philosophic interests,' he wrote,

⁵⁶ Christopher Dawson, 'The Problem of Metahistory: the Nature and Meaning of History and the Cause and Significance of Historical Change', *History Today*, no. 1 (1951), 9-12.

⁵⁷ DOWH, 281.

it is surely inevitable that its philosophy will affect its study of history and that it will not only influence its attitude to history but will determine the choice of the subjects of historical study. If you believe in the theory of progress, for instance, you will see history as the story of progress and you will tend to study that aspect of progress which seems to you the most important, as Lord Acton studied the history of the idea of freedom. And if you are a good historian, as Acton was, your preconceived metahistorical idea will not destroy the value of the historical research which has been motivated by it.⁵⁸

Dawson's sanguine opinion of the relationships between the historian, his opinion, and his historiography was not shared by most of the historians of the following generation. Most notably, the historian Alan Bullock, wrote 'sweeping condemnation[s]' of metahistory and recommended that 'it should be banished from the field of historical study.'⁵⁹ Strictly empiricist, Bullock dismissed the notion of pattern in history and believed that metahistory, with its clean edges and predictable laws, was a preposterous fallacy. In the spirit of Popper's analysis, he believed metahistory promised too much and ultimately failed to produce an objective account of events. In short, the breadth of the metahistorians' claims made their historiography 'thin' and ultimately vulnerable to the findings of more specialized historians.

Dawson argued that Bullock's opinion was flawed by its assumption that the historian can approach a topic without the imposition of his own values. Moreover, Bullock's empiricism, which ultimately rejected the historian's adoption of the sociologist's search for 'general laws governing human development' in favour of an optimistic hope to 'know what has happened,' creates a definition of history that 'is far too narrow to satisfy the historians themselves.'⁶⁰ Mirroring elements of Carr's observations about facts in *What is*

⁵⁸Dawson, 'Metahistory' in *DWH*, 282

⁵⁹Alan Bullock, 'Metahistory', *History Today*, no. 1 (February 1951) quoted in *DWH*, 282.

⁶⁰Dawson, 'Metahistory' in *DWH*, 285.

History?, Dawson wrote that 'the essence of history is not to be found in facts but in traditions,' meaning that all good historians are able to make a contribution to the creation of this tradition by taking the 'relative limitations of fields of particular fields of historical study' and placing them within a much larger framework of 'intuitive understanding, creative imagination, and ... a universal vision.'⁶¹ Dawson's emphasis on the subjective elements of historical writing does not mean that he downplays 'facts' and historical specialization, for as he concluded,

The academic historian is perfectly right in insisting on the importance of the techniques of historical criticism and research. But the mastery of these techniques will not produce great history, any more than a mastery of metrical technique will produce great poetry. For this something more is necessary. The experience of the great historians such as Tocqueville and Ranke leads me to believe that a universal metahistorical vision ... partaking more of the nature of religious contemplation than of scientific generalisation lies very close to the source of their creative power.⁶²

Dawson was careful to acknowledge two points he believed the critics of metahistory were failing to recognize. The first was to admit that metahistory exists whether historians realize it or not, and the second was to accept the role that a metahistorical vision plays in the development of good historiography such as that of Tocqueville, Gibbon, and Hume. He is then able to ask:

If all historiography is so pervaded by metahistorical influences what is the reason for the strong reaction against metahistory which is now so common among English academic historians [like] Bullock?

The answer Dawson believed was a philosophical issue rather than a historical one. 'Historians today are in revolt against the metahistory of Hegel and Croce and Collingwood, not because it is metahistorical, but because they feel it to be the expression of a philosophical attitude that is no longer valid; just as the liberal

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 267-268, 287. E. H. Carr, *What is History?* 2nd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1987) Cf. *RRWC*, 13.

⁶² Dawson, 'Metahistory' in *DWH*, 283.

historians of the eighteenth century revolted against the theological metahistory of the previous period.⁶³

Even if the metahistory is primarily philosophical, the historian must continue to write, ignoring the disparaging claims of philosophers of history who wish to make metahistory essentially the idea of the historian, completely divorced from historical reality. For Dawson, the two could not, nor should they be, placed in separate compartments. Further, while he maintained that even if the 'comparative study of culture' as a task may 'exceed the power of the historian and that we do not yet possess adequate knowledge to make it possible,' the historian should not ignore the benefits from exploring the obvious connections between civilizations 'as a model for historical study.'⁶⁴ More than any historian, Arnold Toynbee's historiography was the most criticized and became ammunition for the cannons of scholars like Bullock who wished to discredit what they believed were Toynbee's metahistorical vices. In defence of his friend and former schoolmate at Winchester, Dawson concluded the article by observing:

It seems to me that Toynbee's initial discussion of the field of historical study and his definition of a civilization as an independent entity that constitutes an intelligible field of historical study are genuinely historical conceptions providing a valuable and necessary criterion for historical study. If the academic historians are to criticize his system, it should not be on account of its metahistorical character, but because he has attempted too much with insufficient material; because he has not been content to lay the foundations of a comparative study of culture, but has tried to construct a complete all embracing system of world history at a single stroke. If this is a mistake, it is one which has been made often enough by historians in the past. Universal history is not metahistory; although it is hardly less unpopular with modern academic historians. The only conclusion that I can draw from this is that metahistory is not the enemy of true history but its guide and its friend, provided that it is good metahistory.⁶⁵

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 284.

By 'good metahistory,' Dawson was attempting to create separation between a historical vision based on empirical data, and the vision that transcends what can be demonstrated through current research.

Dermot Quinn has praised Dawson's view of metahistory as a brilliant *via media* between the universal metahistory of Spengler and Toynbee and the empiricism of metahistory's critics. 'Dawson's insistence on metahistory,' Quinn writes, 'showed the flaws of that school better than the simple reliance on empiricism, which for all its attractions, could never prove anything outside itself.'⁶⁶ Yet, unfortunately for Dawson, if the reaction against metahistory was the product of a reaction against nineteenth-century idealism, his pleas for room for a 'metahistorical vision' in the future were destined to be ignored as his own works, as honest as he tried to be, had a very nineteenth-century idealist tone to them. Considering Dawson's breadth of learning and his notions of the past as a source of unity, these new conditions threatened the legitimacy of his historiography, and to lessen the weight of his polemics.

⁶⁶Quinn, 71.

Understanding Europe (1952)

In spite of the controversies surrounding his discipline, Dawson remained unaffected by the rising 'philosophical trends and continued to write in his own veins.' Even more than *The Making of Europe*, *Understanding Europe* was an attempt by Dawson to educate his contemporaries about the nature of Europe.⁶⁷ 'The average European,' he presumed in his introduction, 'has never given much thought to the nature of the international society to which he belongs. He has been taught to concentrate his attention on the history of his own nation and the political and economic problems of his own state ...[he is also] often at a loss to say what Europe is, what right it has to exist and what are the conditions of its survival.'⁶⁸ Reiterating his well-known thesis, he argued that 'we cannot begin to understand Europe itself unless we study the tradition of Christian culture, which was the original bond of European unity and the source of its common spiritual aims and its common moral values.'⁶⁹ Europe, and even the nations themselves, he noted, cannot be understood 'unless we study it in relation to Europe as a whole, for Europe is essentially a society of peoples and it is through the co-operation and

⁶⁷ Much of the content of *Understanding Europe* is original but there are sections which have appeared in other journals and books.

⁶⁸ *UE*, v.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, vi.

conflicts of the European nations that the characteristic achievements of European culture have been made.’⁷⁰

Whereas Dawson’s other publications on this topic tended to limit ‘Europe’ to the continent, the second half of *Understanding Europe* was devoted to the international character of the idea of Europe and the role of the West in the emerging ‘global village,’ a concept coined by the Canadian Catholic and communication theorist Marshall McLuhan. In the latter half of the book’s first part, Dawson includes chapters on ‘Russia and Asia,’ ‘Asia and Europe,’ and ‘Europe Overseas: Colonization and Empire.’ Of all of these chapters, it is ‘Europe Overseas: The New World of America’ that is the most important chapter of the First Part, as it shows Dawson’s growing preoccupation with the United States. ‘Of all the achievements of the European expansion overseas,’ he wrote at the opening of chapter nine, ‘the creation of the United States is undoubtedly the greatest’, adding that ‘the more the importance of Europe as the centre of world power and economic organization has declined, the more that of the United States has increased, until to-day the existence of Western Europe is becoming increasingly dependent on the economic and military power of the United States.’⁷¹

In the final chapter of the book, Dawson claimed that it is only through ‘re-education’ that Western culture could be saved, for ‘the secularization of modern culture is inseparably connected with the secularization of modern education and the passing of control from the Church and the old teaching corporations to the modern state.’⁷² He nevertheless admitted that the ‘old model’ was not devoid of problems and was ‘in grievous need of reform’, but the intellectual current of the

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, vi.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 241.

age, he believed, introduced change that was in a 'narrowly utilitarian spirit with no awareness of the deeper spiritual and psychological factors that were involved.' Mass-mindedness and a 'shallow flood of universal literacy' were the consequences as religion was stripped away and placed in quarantine, dividing education into the profane and sacred, leading to the 'centrifugal and divided character of modern civilization.'⁷³ By denying religion its place in pedagogy, the social consciousness of Western culture was also divided, leaving the individual with a parochial educational experience. Moreover, even if religious education did exist in schools, it was 'apt to be considered a kind of extra, insecurely tacked on to the general educational structure, not unlike a Gothic church in a modern housing estate.' 'But in the past,' he continued, 'it was the foundation on which the whole edifice of culture was based and which was deeply embedded below the surface of social consciousness.'⁷⁴ Clearly, his hope was that one day the two would be reunited and form the basis of a new society in a new age.

It is this hope that formed the basis for the challenge with which Dawson ended the book.⁷⁵ He sensed that the allure of a secularized society had been destroyed by the wars and depressions of the early twentieth century. A vacuum was left in its place and only a re-spiritualization through an education in the spirituality that created the civilization could save it from destruction. Repeating his thesis from *The Judgement of the Nations*, he wrote,

the forces of violence and aggressiveness that threatened to destroy our world are the direct result of starvation and frustration of man's spiritual nature. For a time Western civilization managed to live on the normal tradition of the past, maintained by a kind of sublimated humanitarian

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 241-242.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁷⁵ The last several pages of *Understanding Europe* are actually taken *Ver Betim* from the lecture.

idealism. but this was essentially a transitional phenomenon, and as humanism and humanitarianism fade away, we see societies more and more animated by the blind will to power which drives them on to destroy one another and ultimately themselves. Civilization can only be creative and live-giving in the proportion that it is spiritualized. Otherwise the increase in power inevitably increases its power for evil and its destructiveness.⁷⁶

Dawson envisioned educational reforms, changes that would play a role in providing unity once again. He contended that the reforms should be inspired by 'the social ideal of Christendom – of the Christian people – *plebs Christiana* – *populus Dei*.'⁷⁷ Indeed, Christians and Christian institutions would be the leaders of such a return. Although he felt passionately about these reforms, the opinion of several reviewers was that he left this idea underdeveloped, thereby making it a rather general recommendation. One of these reviewers was Harold Knight, who pointed out some ambiguities in the book.⁷⁸ Knight observed:

A difficulty which may present itself to the mind of the thoughtful reader on the perusal of this book, is that, after the author's piercing analysis ... one is left wondering how his ideal of Christendom – the *plebs Christiana* or the *populous Dei* – is ever to be restored.⁷⁹

Knight proceeded to highlight the difficulties of Dawson's ideal given the divisions that have plagued the intellectual climate of Christianity since the Renaissance.

⁷⁶UE, 252.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 254.

⁷⁸Some reviews of *Understanding Europe* include: S. T. Cowley Review (Winter 1953): 138; Thomas Corbishley, *Month*, (Nov. 1952): 305-310; Harold Knight, *Hibbert Journal* (July 1952): 419-422; David Arthur, *The Ave Maria*, 9 May 1953; David Mathew 'The European Crisis', *History Today* (August 1952): 575-576; Peter Beckman, O. S. B., *The Raven Review* (undated); Geoffrey Bruun, *Herald Tribune Book Review*, 15 February 1953; *The Spectator*, 4 July 1952. Christopher Sykes, *The Observer*, 15 June 1952; *The Times Literary Supplement*, Friday 7 November 1952.

⁷⁹Harold Knight, 'Review of *Understanding Europe*', *The Hibbert Journal*, (July 1952): 420.

Dawson knew, however, that unity from an ideological standpoint was virtually impossible. Such agreement and uniformity of knowledge neither guaranteed a unified vision nor a dynamic environment for education. Unity, as an ideal, had to begin with the acceptance of Europe's cultural origins and ultimately its identity in the old ideal of Christendom as a convergence of spiritual and temporal ambitions. Only this acceptance of historical origins on the part of Christians could create a basis for unity. For, as Dawson had been arguing for the past two decades, without such a point of reference, Europe as a unity makes little sense. Yet, Knight's observation points once again to ambiguities that appear to plague Dawson's books and the inability of readers to infer Dawson's point.

The reviewers who wrote favourably of the book demonstrate this point in praise that seems to lack analysis beyond the points with which they agree. Thomas Corbishley, for example, acclaimed the book as the 'most penetrating and magisterial of that impressive series of works which have come from his pen. This is no re-hash of *The Making of Europe*, it is a book that stands by itself, possessing all the genius of that great work, and showing the same mastery of sources in a reconstruction of European, British colonial and American history in modern times.'⁸⁰ David Mathew, making a specific reference to Dawson's analysis of Russian society during the period of imperial expansion, wrote that 'the great value of *Understanding Europe* lies in the many penetrating judgments with which each chapter is illuminated. The deep scholarship and wise and balanced thought make this book invaluable. It should be required reading for all who wish to gauge the forces that have moulded the world situation of today.'⁸¹ Mathew ended his review in words of the highest of praise: 'The whole book,' he wrote, 'indicates one of the

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 309.

⁸¹Mathew, 'The European Crisis,' 575.

great merits of Mr. Dawson's approach. He is the least insular of scholars. His wide knowledge of the Western tradition, both in Europe and Overseas, has given us an indispensable survey.'⁸²

In spite of these glowing reviews from scholars and the success of The Gifford Lectures, significant changes were in store for Dawson and his vision for the future. The criticisms of British historians, Bullock and Trevor-Roper among them, the general turn against pattern and meaning in history, and his growing interest with the large Catholic community in the United States were signalling the last years of Dawson's influence in Britain. His vision for education as a means to cultural renewal was a difficult fit in his own country as neither the will nor the institutions existed in England. By the mid-1950s, Dawson's frustration with his own country had moved him to reconsider the future of Europe as a possible leader in what he saw as the coming of a new age.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 576.

Part Seven

Waking the 'Sleeping Giant': A Vision for the United States 1953 to 1962

¹Scott, *Historian*, 194.

A Changed Perspective

Sometime between 1950 and 1952, Dawson lost heart altogether in his quest for a unified Europe inspired by the social ideals of Christendom, which would lead the West out of its cultural decline. His ambition for English Catholics in particular, outlined most clearly in *Beyond Politics*, was waning, and his mounting frustration with his fellow countrymen had been growing since the failure of the 'Sword.' In 1947 he forcefully suggested that 'some Catholics treat the possession of the supernatural truth as a dog treats a bone.'² Years later, in a letter to Edward Watkin, he complained of those 'evils' of 'extroversion, legalism, activism and also an excessive concentration of attention on controversial theology and ... vernacular liturgy' within the English Catholic Church which 'seem ... either new or far more prominent than in the old days.'³ Quoting an article from *The Catholic Herald*, Dawson took his complaint further, observing that the sophistication of Catholic scholars was inadequate. He made specific reference to a reviewer who 'writes as though the *Dark Night of the Soul* was a luxury reserved

²Christopher Dawson, 'The Living Tradition of Christianity', *Catholic Herald*, 10 October 1947, as quoted in Scott, 'Vision and Legacy of Christopher Dawson,' 20.

³Christopher Dawson to Edward Watkin, as quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 175.

for the leisure classes and says that the depths of spiritual experience are “incompatible with the demands of one’s daily occupation.”⁴

His role in the ‘Sword’ and his challenge to all Christians in *The Judgement of the Nations* revealed a desire for English Catholics, and Christians in general, to recognize that in spite of centuries of strife, they had common ground based on their cultural origins.⁵ Many of the Catholics to whom he had been speaking for the past two decades simply were not catching his vision, as they were reticent about the idea of co-operating with other Christians on the basis of the heritage of a common Christian culture. Theologically and historically, Catholics in England had a strong sense of being distinct from Protestants in their membership to what they believed was the true Church. To challenge a minority with roots of this depth, asking them to overcome differences, was not an easy task. Yet if Dawson’s hope for unity was to be achieved, sectarianism had to be overcome:

If Catholics could mobilise the latent Christian resources of our culture – if they could act as spokesmen and leaders to the scattered and inarticulate mass of Christians and even semi-Christians, they would alter the whole balance of power in this country, and through this country in Europe, and through Europe in the World.⁶

Dawson’s post-war mobilization efforts were of no avail, however, and by 1953, his attention turned to the Catholics of America, to the Europe abroad.

Dawson admitted this change in perspective at his seventieth birthday party in 1959, when he declared: ‘When I began writing it was the days of Charles Peguy and Belloc and Chesterton and my eyes were fixed on Europe and the European tradition. But today I have come to feel that it is in [the United States]

⁴Christopher Dawson to Edward Watkin, as quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 175.

⁵Cf. Dawson, ‘The Crisis of Christian Culture: Education,’ 45.

⁶Scott, *Historian*, 20.

that the fate of Christendom will be decided.'⁷ For those familiar with Dawson's earlier ideas this ardent optimism about America may have seemed uncharacteristic, when he had spoken before so critically about the very same nation. It was in the United States that he believed the mechanization of human life had furthest developed.⁸ In contrast with its image as a land of liberty, Dawson believed that the United States, through various mediums, was creating and exporting a culture which actually encumbered personal freedoms and individuality. 'We see in America,' he wrote in 1947, 'how material prosperity and technical proficiency produce social conformity, so that without any intervention on the part of the state, men of their own accord tend to think the same and look the same and behave in the same way.'⁹ He even went as far as to compare the United States with communist countries in his assertion that 'in the U.S.A., no less than in the U.S.S.R., we are conscious of the victory of the mass over the individual.'¹⁰ He maintained criticisms such as these for the rest of his life. Yet in the years following the Second World War, Dawson was much more optimistic about the role of the United States in his vision for the renewal of Christian culture. The changes were the result of a series of events which led to his fuller understanding of the possibilities that existed for his recommendations in America.

⁷*Ibid.*, 197-198.

⁸Christopher Dawson, *America and the Secularization of Modern Culture* (St. Paul: University of St. Thomas Press, 1960).

⁹Christopher Dawson, 'Religious Liberty and the New Political Forces', *Month*, no. 183 (1947): 44-45.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 44.

One individual who was responsible at least in part for this changed perspective was John Mulloy, a schoolteacher from Philadelphia.¹¹ A 'devoted admirer' of Dawson's books, Mulloy flew to England in 1953 to meet him in person and to discuss several ideas for future projects as well as the opportunities which existed in the United States. Aware of changes in American education and Dawson's recommendations for Christian education, Mulloy saw a tremendous opportunity for Dawson's ideas in America, especially in the extensive Catholic University and College system which, in the 1950s, maintained a conservative philosophy of education that took seriously the place of Christian culture in the intellectual development of the West.¹² In direct contrast to England, where Dawson complained that no one read his books, these same books had become 'central to the [U.S.] Catholic college curriculum by the late 1940s.'¹³ The interest in Western civilization and history as a means to understanding the present was not confined to the Catholic schools but was a general trend throughout the United States. Peter Novick notes that the Second World War saw an exponential rise in the use of the Western Civilization course in American post-secondary institutions, primarily because of the 'influential report of Harvard's General Education Committee published in 1945.'¹⁴ Novick goes on to point out that the climate of the period could be summed up in Daniel Bell's assertion that the goals of a

¹¹ According to Patrick Allitt, Dawson and Mulloy exchanged over 400 letters. See Allitt, 269.

¹² One of Dawson's contentions in the years leading up to the Second World War was that an insufficient number of people read his books. Clearly, Catholic Universities provided a potentially large market for them and therefore a means to make his books more popular.

¹³ Allitt, 269.

¹⁴ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 312.

Western Civilization course must be concerned with 'the principles of a free society, the need to provide a consistent image of the American experience, the definition of democracy in a world of totalitarianism, the efforts to fortify the common heritage of Western civilization, and the need to provide a "common learning" for all Americans as a foundation of national unity.'¹⁵ If one were to remove the rhetoric of American national unity from the quotation, the words could have come from Dawson himself. Yet the aims of Western Civilization courses – indeed the aims of education in general – had to rise above national culture, which was a fairly recent political phenomenon. Instead, as Dawson had been emphasizing since 1944, the origins of Western civilization needed to take the much earlier context of Christian culture more seriously.

In England, Dawson's historiography had been falling out of favour, leading to another important factor that caused him to cast his vision to the United States: the formidable tradition of historiography among American Catholics. In the United States, historians such as Raymond Sontag, Parker T. Moon, Robert H. Lord, Gaillard Hunt and Carleton J. H. Hayes had forged a relatively respected path for Dawson's own historical perspective and vision.¹⁶ Hayes in particular had much in common with his English counterpart, having risen to fame in the interwar years through his use of culture as the foundation to any study of history, his condemnation of excessive nationalism, and his encouragement of interfaith cooperation.¹⁷ With the progressive tradition among historians in the United States

¹⁵Daniel Bell, *The Reforming of General Education: The Columbia College Experience in its National Setting* (New York, 1966) as quoted in Novick, 312.

¹⁶Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 174n.

¹⁷For an excellent comparison of the lives and careers of Hayes and Dawson see Allitt, 237-276.

and the respected historiography of American Catholic historians, Dawson was right in his assumption that he was entering an environment which might be more accepting of his ideas.

During this time, Dawson hoped increasingly that American Catholics could be leaders in a nation that was a superpower for democracy and freedom. 'American Catholics,' he suggested, 'stand out as the one great remaining minority that can never be completely assimilated because it forms part of an international and universal society.'¹⁸ According to Schwartz, 'such a tenuous assumption reveals how, as with Chesterton's dreams of an American distributist democracy, Dawson's high, and even desperate, hopes for United States leadership in a Catholic crusade against totalitarianism could distort his judgement occasionally.'¹⁹ Whether or not his judgments were naive, Dawson's optimism about the United States was clear, and the education of American Catholics would preoccupy his mind for the rest of his career.

¹⁸Dawson, 'Education and Christian Culture,' 220.

¹⁹Schwartz, 1066.

The Dynamics of World History (1956)

While Dawson continued to work on new projects such as *The Mongol Mission* (1954) (*Mission to Asia*) and *Medieval Essays* (1955), he advised John Mulloy in the preparation of a book which outlined his perspective on world history.²⁰ *Dynamics of World History* was a comprehensive summary of the ideas Dawson had been presenting since he began writing in 1920, from his earliest articles about culture to his reflections on the continuing debate about the nature of history, and more specifically the place of metahistory within the historical profession. John Mulloy provided a rather extensive introduction explaining the layout and content of the material.

‘It is little wonder,’ Mulloy observed, ‘that [the social and political upheavals of the last 200 years have] increasingly turned the attention of the educated layman and even the general public to questions concerning man’s historical destiny and the meaning of the present moment in world history. Contemporary philosophers of history have obtained an ever widening audience

²⁰Due to restrictions in space, *Medieval Essays* and *Mission to Asia* will not be discussed. However, a list of reviews is included in the bibliography of the present study. *Mission to Asia* was the only volume published of a failed project envisioned by Dawson and Sheed and Ward which describes the accounts of Franciscan missionaries who ventured into Asia to meet with Khan.

for their views.²¹ Mulloy noted further that the present volume was compiled in order to contribute to the numerous philosophies of history from the likes of Spengler, F. S. C. Northrup, and Arnold Toynbee, and thereby to provide another conception of world history. In many ways, the book was written to distinguish Dawson from these other metahistorians, as the trend over the past decade had been to view all of them as vulnerable to the same criticisms. In its content, layout, and comprehensive nature, *Dynamics* was conceived to serve as a model for historical scholarship in an era that was rapidly losing faith in the abilities of the historian to demonstrate historical truth.

At over four hundred pages, *Dynamics of World History* is a marathon, and was an ambitious project given the scepticism of the new generation of historians. It is a compilation of thirty-one previously published articles and confirms the breadth of learning that has characterized Dawson's career. It is divided into two parts: the first part is entitled 'Towards the Sociology of History', the chapters of which are in fact republished articles from the 1920s and 1930s, first published in *The Sociological Review*. These chapters reiterate Dawson's notions of the organic nature of culture, the theory of progress, and the religious character of both. In the subsection entitled 'T. S. Eliot and the Meaning of Culture' (1949), he takes his analysis of the nature of culture further by adding to the discussion more contemporary uses of the term, especially by those writers to whom Eliot is responding.²²

²¹ Mulloy, Introduction to *DOWH*, v-vi.

²² See Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (London: Pelican, 1963) for more on this era and the attempt to define the word 'culture.'

In his earliest articles, Dawson attempted to clarify prevalent misunderstandings concerning the use of the term 'culture.' 'A culture', he wrote, 'is a common way of life – a particular adjustment of man to his natural surroundings and his economic needs.'²³ Once again, Dawson attempted to reemphasize this definition, not so much to clarify, but to 'rescue the word from the bad company into which it has fallen.'²⁴ Culture, he argued, 'has been adopted by the planners and the politicians, and has become part of the international language or jargon of propaganda and ideological controversy.' Moreover, he believed that these 'politicians' used the term 'as a convenient omnibus expression to cover all the subordinate non-economic social activities which have to be included in their organization of a planned society.'²⁵ Like Eliot in his book *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, Dawson believed that 'the modern degradation of the word by politicians and publicists ... is a degradation of the old aristocratic and individualist ideal of literary culture, and has little or nothing to do with the modern sociological concept of culture as the principle of social unity and continuity'²⁶ Such a contention with 'politicians and publicists' and their 'ideological controversy' was an extension of his quarrel with the national and political interpretations of history.

The failure to accept the sociological definition of culture not only leaves the term open to manipulation of ideologues, but it also hinders a proper rendering

²³ *DWH*, 16. The above definition was originally written in 1928.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 108. Originally published in *Month* as 'T. S. Eliot on the Meaning of Culture', no. 1, (1949): 151-157.

²⁵ *DOWH*, 109.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

of history. Dawson, however, also knew that an acknowledgement of the sociological definition of the term did not guarantee that the religious character of culture would be accepted. Dawson maintained that 'Recent German writers such as Otto, Heiler, and Carl Beth tend rather to exaggerate the mystical and intuitive character of religious experience, whether in its primitive or advanced manifestations. But in [England] the anti-metaphysical prejudice is still dominant. A theory is not regarded as "scientific" unless it explains religion in terms of something else – as an artificial construction from nonreligious elements.'²⁷ It was this same contention with what is understood as 'scientific', especially in the area of the historian and his historiography, on which Dawson expanded in the second half of the book

The book's latter part contains two sections: 'Christianity and the Meaning of History' and 'The Vision of the Historian.' Many of the articles that comprise this second section discuss important historical figures such as Augustine, Marx, Edward Gibbon, Wells, Spengler and Toynbee. Throughout these chapters, Dawson reiterated many of his notions of history and metahistory. Indeed, he was to discover that the debates had not subsided but that the prejudice was only growing stronger against metahistorical assumptions.

Given the nature of these debates, it is not surprising that reactions to *Dynamics of World History* were mixed.²⁸ The discussion of metahistory was

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 175. Originally published in 1931.

²⁸ Reviews of *Dynamics of World History* include Sister Mary Augustina, *Books on Trial*, March 1957; Harry Elmer Barnes, *American Historical Review*, October 1957; Geoffrey Barraclough, 'History at a Turning Point?', *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 17 October 1957; A. C. F. Beales, 'The Quintessential Dawson', *The Tablet*, 19 October 1957; John F. Broderick, *America*, 4 May 1957; Geoffrey Bruun, 'Why Civilizations Rise and Decline', *New York Times*, 25 February 1957; Philip Burnham, 'Dawson Identifies Themes of West', *The Monitor*, 3 May 1957; Thomas J. Casey, S. J., *Catholic Review Service*, 13 May 1957; F. J. Gallagher, S. J., *Best Sellers*, 15 April, 1957; Friedrich Heer, *Die Furche*, 7 May 1960; Christopher Hill, 'The Church, Marx and History',

beginning to shape the new generation of historians' opinions about the role of the historian and the ability of the historian to demonstrate overarching absolutes about meaning in history. In this light, several key observations about how Dawson and his historiography are perceived arise in many of the reviews. Firstly, while Dawson was considered by reviewers in the 1920s and 1930s to be a first rate historian educated in the latest scholarship of his contemporaries, by the 1950s he was relegated to that realm of perpetual suspicion: a 'Catholic historian.' 'During the past ten years or so,' a reviewer for *The Times Literary Supplement* wrote, 'the wider public have shown themselves more and more sympathetic towards those heterodox, mostly amateur scholars who have done what the professionals failed to do, and among whom Mr. Christopher Dawson is perhaps the most distinguished.'²⁹ The reviewer's observation is double-edged, which, on the one hand praises Dawson for his ability to reach a public audience while at the same time separating him from the historical profession. While most reviewers were willing to admit that Dawson's historiography and overall historical sense surpassed the learning and approach of other metahistorians, they refused to admit that this made his views legitimate. Often implicit rather than stated, these views surface in many of the reviews that were written in England. The reviewer for *The Times Literary Supplement* continued by pointing out:

The Spectator, 20 September 1957; Frank S. Meyer, 'The Great Dawson,' *National Review*, 13 April, 1957; Thomas P. Neill, 'Toward a Philosophy of History', *Social Order*, November, 1957; Edmund A. Opitz, 'Behind Civilization ... A Vision', *The Freeman*, January 1958; Reginald Petty, 'Difficult to March in Step with Mr. Dawson', *Telegraph and Argus*, 4 October 1957; Gerard Rooney, *Sign*, May 1957; Walter L. Scratch, *Hollywood Citizen News*, 5 August 1957; *The Tablet*, 26 April 1958; *The Catholic Worker*, May 1957; *The Catholic Herald* 25 October 1957; *The Times Educational Supplement* 22 November 1957; 'Forces in the Making of History', *Irish Independent*, 21 December 1956; *Denver Register*, 14 April 1957; *Southern Daily Echo*, 7 October 1957.

²⁹'God and History', *The Times Literary Supplement*, no. 2913, 27 December 1957, 781.

Perhaps the most subtly deceptive characteristic of Mr. Dawson's method is its apparent foundation on modern scientific principles. Like Spengler ... Mr. Dawson is much given to analogies from the natural sciences. Words such as 'dynamism,' 'organic structure,' 'polarity' and other metaphorical borrowings from physics and biology crop up with some frequency. There is talk of the Id and the Super-Ego in a religious connotation.³⁰

That the reviewer was influenced by current trends is obvious from the attacks which followed:

We have learnt from Dr. Popper just how fallacious some of the analogies are, and how misleading it can be to describe historical events in terminology more appropriate for the classification of a physical species. And yet Mr. Dawson's interest in science stops short at the metaphorical stage; in *The Dynamics of World History* there is no mention of such truly dynamic figures as Copernicus, Kepler, or Galileo, and no entry in a copious index, under the heading 'science' itself. What Mr. Dawson appears to have done, through the guidance of some unconscious instinct, is to neutralize his most dangerous opponents by apparently assimilating them into his system.³¹

In spite of the attacks of the reviewer for *The Times Literary Supplement*, many historians of a new generation would share the reviewer's sentiments, even if some American writers – such as Harry Elmer Barnes who reviewed the book for the *American Historical Review* – believed that Dawson 'almost measures up to the pattern of the ideal historian recommended by James Harvey Robinson in his *The New History*.'³² Unfortunately for Dawson, metahistory continued to be a 'bugbear' of the academic historian, and would eventually erode the acceptability of his historiography.³³ His challenge to give a place to metahistory in the academy was ignored. There may have been a widening audience in the middle of the

³⁰*Ibid.*, 781.

³¹*Ibid.*, 782.

³²Harry Elmer Barnes, 'Review of *The Dynamics of World History*,' *American Historical Review*, (October 1957): 79.

³³*DWH*, 284. See for example Geoffrey Bruun, 'Why Civilizations Rise and Decline', *New York Times*, 25 February 1956.

century for metahistories, but Mulloy's observations at the beginning of the book sadly underestimated the trends in historiography and the exalted place of the 'philosophers of history and their views' – at least those philosophers who see pattern in history.³⁴ The *New York Times Book Review* claimed that 'for breadth of knowledge and lucidity of style [Dawson] has few rivals.'³⁵ The description, while flattering, is illuminating in its choice of words. Indeed, the review creates an image of Dawson as more of an essayist rather than an academic historian. Such was the way of the future. For if the reaction against metahistory and the broad strokes which make it possible was merely a trickle in the decade following the Second World War, by the 1960s it was a raging torrent. 'The era of Great syntheses was closing,' notes a historian of the period, 'and in one of the most curious intellectual fads of the century, historians and critics of the twentieth century began to argue that the whole world was accelerating, leaving no room for grand generalizations on the nature of things, but only a flux to make pragmatic gestures.'³⁶

In the years following the publication of *Dynamics*, Dawson continued to concentrate on themes which could explain contemporary issues and how Catholics should approach them. One of these important questions was the growing independence of colonial regions and the founding of nations in Asia such as Burma, India, Indonesia, Transjordan (Jordan), Lebanon, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Ceylon (Sri Lanka), among others.

³⁴Mulloy, Introduction to *DWH*,

³⁵*New York Times Book Review* as quoted on back cover of Mentor Omega Edition, 1962.

³⁶Allitt, 271.

The Revolt of Asia (1957)

At only forty-eight pages, *The Revolt of Asia* is one of the shortest of Dawson's books.³⁷ The book was an attempt to highlight unprecedented changes in the cultural and political landscape of the world due to the rise of nationalist movements in Asia and Africa. The nationalist movements could be traced back to Western colonization efforts, and were ultimately a result of Western-inspired political philosophy.

'Western man has to shoulder a double responsibility,' Dawson wrote concerning the West's place in the emerging global society. 'He is the archetypal revolutionary – the Prometheus who stole fire from heaven and set the world ablaze. Yet at the same time he is an imperialist, a capitalist and an exploiter – the obvious target for the criticism and moral indignation of the old peoples of Asia and the new peoples of Africa whom he has both awakened.'³⁸ Obviously this revolutionary role had placed the West in a dilemma that was potentially volatile

³⁷ Christopher Dawson, *The Revolt of Asia* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1957), hereafter *ROA*. *The Revolt of Asia* was a reprint of two articles in book form. They included 'Christianity and the Orient', *The Tablet*, no. 208 (1956): 192-193; 196-198; 'Christianity and the Oriental Cultures', *The Tablet*, no. 208 (1956): 222-224; 245, 247. The book was also republished in his book *The Movement of World Revolution* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1959).

³⁸ *ROA*, 5.

due to the changes it had initiated with its many ideologies and technological advances. Advantageous or otherwise, Western expansion had placed the world on a course towards unification. Dawson was quick to note, however, that *unification* did not necessarily create *unity*, especially considering the social and economic imbalances generated by Western hegemony. As Western civilization expanded across the globe, cultures that otherwise had little or no contact with the West were exposed to new systems of beliefs and cultural ideals. Included in these ideals were values that were both religious and secular. Unfortunately, the transmission of the latter elements of Western culture overshadowed the former. Given the religious character of non-Western cultures, the spread of secular ideals created possible areas of common ground and unity between Western and Eastern cultures. While it seemed that secularization had become the prevalent cultural phenomenon transmitted by the West into the world's cultures, Dawson remained hopeful: 'In the past religion has been the greatest of the powers that formed the mind and developed the cultures of the Asiatic peoples. At the present moment it is in eclipse owing to the wave of secular influences that has accompanied the spread of Western culture. But it is too soon to say how far this eclipse will go. Certainly it is not total and there seems little probability that it will ever become so.'³⁹

One of the potentially devastating effects following the spread of Western culture was the rise of nationalism in the East. As nations in the East gained political and economic sovereignty, Dawson envisioned rivalries and outcomes similar to those that plagued Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although he believed the situation in Asia was 'fortunately more acute' than that which existed in nineteenth-century Europe, being 'long drawn out and

³⁹ROA, 10.

spread over many different areas,' there were certainly possibilities for a 'nationalist reaction [that] may easily become reactionary or destructive.'⁴⁰ As in his other books in which he investigated contemporary issues, Dawson lamented that most researchers are solely interested in the phenomenon from the political standpoint. What these writers failed to appreciate, he believed, was that the changes in the relationship between East and West ushered in much more profound issues than merely political evolution. By shaping foreign policies that were directed at building a framework of political unity, cultural and religious commonalities – as means to open avenues for dialogue – were completely overlooked. Just as political solutions limited unity in the Western world, so too would they create a potentially artificial foundation for international order. At stake was world peace, and 'nationalism has nowhere been a force' towards that end.⁴¹

Dawson concluded his introduction to the book with an ambiguous suggestion for a solution to the 'oriental problem.' In a passage that must have confounded foreign policy experts, Dawson wrote,

Christians cannot but feel ashamed of the little that has been done towards understanding the new religious situation arising from the revolutionary changes of the past fifty years. Neither the technological process that is forcing East and West together, nor the resurgence of the nationalist forces that is tearing them apart can save the modern world from destruction. Salvation can only come from some power capable of creating a spiritual unity which will transcend and comprehend the material unity of the new world order. And where can this power be found save in religion?⁴²

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 6, 9.

⁴¹*ROA*, 10.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 10.

Believing that the religious elements of Christian culture provided the adhesive for an ailing Western civilization, Dawson was optimistic that Christianity was a vessel for international dialogue.

At first sight there seems to be little hope that Christianity will be the gainer or that there is any more chance of the eastern world's becoming Christian than there was a hundred years ago. Nevertheless, though we cannot accept the cocksure, historical determinism of the Marxians or the ambitious speculations of the philosophers of history, like Spengler and Toynbee, we believe as Christians that the hand of God is at work in history and that the great revolution of world culture that is taking place ... is the instrument of divine purpose.⁴³

Consequently,

the Church to-day and in the immediate future is confronted with a tremendous opportunity. The old barriers that divided the nations have been broken down, and the sacred laws that ruled men's lives for thousands of years have lost their power. If Christianity were just one among the other world religions, then it too would fail and fade as they are doing. But we know that it is not so, that Christ is the only answer to the world's spiritual need, and that the Church has a universal mission to bring the Gospel of Christ to all nations.⁴⁴

Dawson admitted that such an ambition for global action faced at least two tremendous obstacles. The first was Communism, the 'negative opposition to modern secularism and materialism.' Communism was spreading throughout China and Central Asia. The same economic inequality that had given rise to it in Eastern Europe had motivated other impoverished nations to take the same reactionary path as Russia, making a course for 'Christian action most difficult.'⁴⁵ The second obstacle he identified was the religious character of nationalism that places national loyalty in the same category as loyalty to religious traditions. From this perspective nationalism in the Eastern world very often 'rejects Christianity as

⁴³ *ROA*, 39.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁵ *ROA*, 45-46.

an alien power – an instrument of foreign domination.’⁴⁶ Ironically, given Dawson’s rejection of solutions at the national level in *The Making of Europe*, his solution involved each nation individually. Rather than trying to penetrate the cultural life of the region – something that Western culture had already done – he envisioned solutions that worked within the individual national culture and political structures. To overcome the obstacles in the way of expanding Christian culture in the East, Dawson proposed three possible solutions.

The first means to a solution to the ‘oriental problem’ was that of intellectual infusion. ‘In the first place,’ he noted, ‘the most obvious approach seems to be to the new educated classes who are the creators and leaders of the modern Orient. They are the most accessible to us since they belong to the same world-society and are faced with the same problems as we are.’ What he meant by this was that one of the problems faced by the East was growing secularization due to Western influence. As an aid to these issues, ‘Christianity enjoys a certain advantage, since it has a far greater experience of the religious problems of a secularized society than any other religion except perhaps Judaism.’⁴⁷ The groundwork for education as a means to the spread of Christian culture in the East was already laid as the ‘educated Asian tends to be educated in Western literature rather than in the classical literatures of the oriental cultures and this provides a basis for mutual discussion and understanding.’⁴⁸

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 46.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸*ROA*, 47. In a footnote Dawson exclaimed ‘I have been told that all Indonesian intellectuals read Graham Green, though I think this must be rather an exaggeration!’ p. 47.

The second means to a solution was the creation of a social vision in the form of missionary activity to those areas that are the most remote from Western influence. Dawson explained that '... the world of the villages and of traditional culture ... is often more accessible to missionary influence, for it is here among the poor, the unprivileged and the outcasts, that the supernatural appeal of the Gospel is most evident.'⁴⁹

The third, and what Dawson believed to be the most important potential solution, was to be found in the urban areas. Drawing from the experience of the early Church in Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome among the 'uprooted denationalized cosmopolitan population he envisioned a similar movement among the lower and middle classes that may lead the cities to become the centres of Christianity in the East.' In a prophetic tone Dawson concluded,

Is it not possible that ... the key points of oriental Christianity will be found in the great urban centres like Calcutta and Bombay, Tokyo, Shanghai, Canton, Singapore – that the new churches will find their future leaders in the same urban cosmopolitan classes from which the leaders of the primitive Church were drawn? The soil must be broken – the plough and the harrow must do their work before the seed can produce a good harvest. But this is the age of the plough and the harrow, not the time of harvest.⁵⁰

The Revolt of Asia brought up themes that were new for Dawson. Apart from a chapter in *Understanding Europe* and a couple of related articles published between 1951 and 1955, he had not divulged many of his insights on the place of non-Western nations in his vision of a renewed Christendom.⁵¹ Yet Dawson's

⁴⁹ROA, 47.

⁵⁰ROA, 48.

⁵¹This does not mean that non-Western cultures were completely absent from Dawson's earlier articles and books. For the greater part of his career, however, he was concerned with the state and future of Europe and North America as the standard bearers of a renewed Christendom. For at least two articles see 'La Expansion de Europa: La colonizacion occidental del imperio Britanico', *Estudios Americanos*, no. 4 (1952): 27-51; 'Ages of Change', *The Tablet*, 203 (1954):

grasp of the contemporary events central to the themes of the book was admirable. His warnings about future challenges posed by the adolescence of Asian nations were continually confirmed during his lifetime, and continue to be so even today. Communism in North Korea and China are only two examples of the threats to which Dawson was referring. Apart from an ambiguity surrounding the definition and nature of Asia and 'orientalism,' his analysis of a post-colonial Asia was strong.⁵²

As to his proposals for future peace between East and West, his grasp was less sure. The result was an acute yet ultimately unsatisfying glimpse into his fears of, and hopes for, independent colonies of European nations. For all the significance of his insights into possible solutions to the rise of nationalism and its possible devastating consequences for world peace, the book should never have been published as it was, with less than fifty pages. Due to its brevity, the book's suggestions remained far too abstract and conceptual and, in turn, underdeveloped. How, for example, would Dawson have expected the West to educate leaders and intellectuals of the newly founded nations of Asia, especially considering their recent, and indeed celebrated, independence from the yoke of Western oppression as especially seen in the cases of India and China? Also, who would carry out the task of educating them and why would one expect them to want to learn about the religious elements of Western culture? There is in this the underlying presumption throughout the book that the former colonies wish to avoid secularization and the irreligiosity of Western culture. This is something about which Dawson could not

489-490; A. A. Norton and Joan Thelluson Nourse (eds.) *A Christian Approach to Eastern Literature: An Anthology* (1952)

⁵²See Murray, Introduction to *The Making of Europe*, xxx-xxxi for an example of Dawson's tendency to be ambiguous, especially when he refers to 'orientalism.'

have been sure. Moreover, he was guilty of oversimplification. In his analysis of the 'oriental problem' he steers clear of the multiplicity of issues that emerged in post-colonial Asia in favour of a more a sweeping diagnosis that reduces the problems to a nationalism that will inevitably be concerned with destroying its former oppressors. Ultimately, Dawson avoids providing much-needed details by placing his hope in the divine purposes of history which give license for ambiguity. To be fair, however, Dawson admitted that the non-political aspects of oriental nationalism 'demands much fuller study than it has yet received.'⁵³ He would, in the years following, devote more time to these topics.

By 1957 a number of Catholic colleges and universities in the United States were heeding to Dawson's challenges, even if the numbers remained fewer than he would have liked. The first was Saint Mary's College, Indiana. Bruno Schlesinger had developed a programme in 'Christianity and Culture' in which Dawson's works were central.⁵⁴ The small number of colleges developing programs around his philosophies of education did not reflect the significant number of colleges interested in his ideas. Indeed, by 1957 Dawson and his ideas had gained somewhat of a legendary status in many of the Catholic colleges and universities. It must have come as a surprise to Dawson, then, when he received a letter the following year with an offer for a teaching position in Catholic studies, not from a Catholic university but from the very Protestant College of Divinity at Harvard University.

⁵³ *ROA*, 10.

⁵⁴ Allitt, 269.

Harvard University

In a letter to John Mulloy in 1955, Dawson wrote:

America can find in Christian culture a bond and means of understanding with the world which she aspires to lead ... in the present world situation, the role of America seems to be that of the defender of Western and to some extent of Christian culture against the menace of Soviet technological totalitarianism, so that from this point of view a knowledge of the Western and Christian traditions is essential if America is to take the role of world leadership I must say that Harvard seems the most enlightened of the American universities in these respects.⁵⁵

In retrospect, Dawson's observations seem rather prescient, for in the following year he would be teaching there. That same year, a wealthy convert to Catholicism, Chauncey Stillman, endowed money to Harvard University to establish a Chair of Roman Catholic Studies at their Divinity School. The aim of the endowment was to 'cultivate the understanding of the theology and closely related studies of the Roman Catholic Church' with the ambition that 'future historians will look back upon [the establishing of the Chair] as the beginning, after centuries, of an era of happier relationships between [Protestantism and Catholicism]'.⁵⁶ Dawson's experience certainly made him a perfect candidate. When Stillman was made

⁵⁵ Christopher Dawson to John J. Mulloy, 29 January 1955, as quoted in Schwartz, 'Third Spring', 1067.

⁵⁶ Douglas Horton to Christopher Dawson, 6 February 1958, quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 180-181.

aware that Dawson was at the top of the list, he was reported to have been ‘very pleased.’

On 6 February 1958 Dawson was officially asked in a letter from the Dean, Douglas Horton, to consider being the first to hold the position.⁵⁷ Dawson was well aware of the significance of such a development and regarded it as providential. In spite of his being sixty-eight years old and suffering from chronic illnesses, he accepted the position without reservation, confirming to his wife Valerie that ‘it is a call.’⁵⁸ After Dawson had accepted the position, he was contacted by an excited Stillman, explaining what an extraordinary event it was to have a Catholic scholar at Harvard Divinity. Horton himself noted that ‘never before in the history of the United States has there been anything resembling this professorship – a chair of Roman Catholic Studies in a university divinity school Protestant in tradition and Protestant in outlook.’⁵⁹ Indeed, as Allitt has noted, ‘this entry into one of the old temples of Protestant learning was a symbolically important step in the “coming of age” of American Catholicism in the 1950s.’⁶⁰

While at Harvard, Dawson wrote three books: *The Movement of World Revolution* (1959), *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture* (1960), and *The Crisis of Western Education* (1961). Dawson’s introduction to *The Movement of World Revolution* revealed his growing concern with the currents of the new

⁵⁷The entire letter is published in Scott, *Historian*, 180-181.

⁵⁸Scott, *Historian*, 181.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 180.

⁶⁰Allitt, 269.

concept of the world's history.⁶¹ Rather than addressing the notions of metahistory, his concern was primarily with the growth of a relativistic approach to global history. Believing like many of his contemporaries that, for educational purposes, global history should begin with Western history, Dawson complained that 'the new conception of World History as may be seen for example in the UNESCO world history ... rejects this conception entirely and aspires to produce a work which will be ecumenical in treatment and scope, embracing the whole history of every people from China to Peru without preference or prejudice.'⁶² As the book progressed, Dawson revealed that not only was the democratization of world history a matter of context and perspective, but also one of the weakening of content. 'There is a serious danger', he warned, 'that the relative widening of the historical perspective to include the non-European civilizations may be accompanied by an absolute decline in the quality and standard of general European history.'⁶³

In this lengthy passage from the book Dawson quoted a worthwhile section from a book by Nirad Chaudhuri, who refers to himself as an 'Unknown Indian.' Although the following quotation is lengthy, it bears repeating here as it appeared in *The Movement of World Revolution* and it summarizes Dawson's concerns about the future of the historical profession. Chaudhuri wrote,

⁶¹ Christopher Dawson, *The Movement of World Revolutions* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1959) hereafter *MWR*. *MWR* was an anthology of previously published material. Chapters 6, 9 and 10 in *MWR* formed the content of *The Revolt of Asia*. The other chapters were published in *History Today*, *Four Quartets*, *The Commonweal* and the *London Times Literary Supplement*.

⁶² *MWR*, 5. The notion that Western Civ. was the starting point for global history was especially true in the United States college system in the late 1940s and early 1950s. For an exaggerated, yet informative account of this period of American history see Gary Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 46-52.

⁶³ *MWR*, 6.

In the last few decades there has certainly been seen in Europe, or at all events in England, a decline in historical knowledge, accompanied by a pronounced recoil from the historical attitude. This is a retrograde phenomenon, for if there is anything that distinguishes man from the other animals, it is memory or consciousness of duration, and I cannot understand how the European man, having attained the high degree of historical consciousness that he did in the nineteenth century, can have stepped back from it to the uncultured man's bondage to the present, and the still more uncultured man's bondage to the eschatology of political dogma. Yet what the European man is displaying more often than not today is an utter lack of the historical sense. I sometimes seek the solution of the puzzle in that Spenglerian vision, the dreadful and tragic *Untergang des Abendlandes*, the untimely decline of the European peoples on their home continent, brought about by an internal strife as insensate, as inescapable and as suicidal as that of the Greek cities. I ask myself: Are we witnessing a whole society's senile decay of memory?⁶⁴

Although Dawson noted that Chaudhuri's judgement was 'very severe,' he admitted most emphatically that, as an observation of the state of the historical profession, it was 'not altogether lacking in justification.'⁶⁵

Dawson concluded the book with those chapters that appeared several years before, in the form of articles, on the problems posed by oriental nationalism in *The Revolt of Asia*. He did so for very good reason. *The Movement of World Revolution* was essentially Dawson's challenge to the readers that a new wave of relativity among historians undermined the place of the West as a leading influence in the world. Western historians and their 'lack of ... historical sense' through both specialization and relativism were causing the West to do nothing less than deny any unity in the past during a time when it needed to maintain a sense of purpose and identity amidst the possible threat from the non-Western nations. In spite of – or perhaps *because* of – these conditions, Dawson attempted to reinforce his

⁶⁴ Nirad Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 341, as quoted in *MWR*, 6-7.

⁶⁵ *MWR*, 7.

assertion about the centrality of Christian culture to any study of Western civilization the following year in *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture*.⁶⁶

Subtitled 'A Way to the Renewal of Human Life,' *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture* was one volume of a series of volumes entitled *Religious Perspectives*. Editors for the series included Karl Barth, Jacques Maritain, Martin D'Arcy, and Paul Tillich, among others of similar reputation. The ambition of the series was the 'rediscovery of man and of God' in order to correct what Ruth Nanda Anshen, the Chief editor of the series, referred to as that 'false antinomy between revelation and reason, faith and knowledge, grace and nature, courage and anxiety.'⁶⁷ For, as the statement of purpose reads:

Religious Perspectives attempts to show the fallacy of the apparent irrelevance of God in history. The Series submits that no convincing image of man can arise, in spite of the many ways in which human thought has tried to reach it, without a philosophy of human nature and human freedom which does not exclude God.⁶⁸

Dawson readily accepted the ambitions of the series, and he chose to write specifically about Christian culture. Throughout the book, he attempted to highlight the need for Westerners not only to recognize the role Christianity played in the formation of the Western mind but also to embrace a concept of Christianity that is grounded in the historical development of the West, rather than overemphasize abstract theological ideals. He noted that what often is understood as the essence of a 'Christian culture' is some 'ideal of social perfection' by which

⁶⁶ Christopher Dawson, *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture: A Way to the Renewal of Human Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), hereafter *HRCC*.

⁶⁷ Ruth Nanda Anshen, Introduction to *HRCC*, 7.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

'existing societies can be judged.'⁶⁹ This approach was that of the secular humanists who had very little interest in the actual origins of Christianity. Thus Dawson charged that 'the only true criterion of a Christian culture is the degree in which the social way of life is based on the Christian faith.'⁷⁰ Dawson believed that reforms in education were the best means to achieve these ends, and it was this theme of educational reform he attempted to discuss in greater detail in *The Crisis of Western Education*.

⁶⁹ *HRCC*, 14.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

The Crisis of Western Education (1961)

‘The intellectuals who have succeeded the priests as the guardians of the higher tradition of Western culture,’ Dawson wrote in 1947, ‘have been strong only in their negative work of criticism and disintegration. They have failed to provide an integrated system of principles and values which could unify modern society, and consequently they have proved unable to resist the non-moral, inhuman and irrational forces which are destroying the humanist no less than the Christian traditions of Western culture.’⁷¹ Such was the failure of modern education which Dawson sought to address in *The Crisis of Western Education*.⁷² Although this break in the cultural inheritance of the West was a central theme in most of his previous books, *The Crisis of Western Education* was Dawson’s first and only book written specifically to analyse education and to provide recommendations to create unity through education, and ultimately, to show how Catholic institutions could take the lead in such initiatives. In spite of his hope for the latter, he was acutely aware of the cool reception his earlier articles on education received from many Catholics in the 1950s. Considering the respect that

⁷¹ RC, 106.

⁷² For an excellent summary of Dawson’s criticism of modern education and vision for Catholic education see Schwartz, 1069-1083.

his new post at the leading university in the United States commanded, the book was an ambitious attempt to take the analysis and recommendations in his articles further in order to change the perception and practice of education in America.

The book has three parts. The first – ‘The History of Liberal Education in the West’ was a survey of the origins and nature of education in the West from the Greeks to modern State education. Dawson hoped to capture through his analysis the essence of what it means to educate. Imperative to this study was a wider definition of what is understood as a society’s culture and its multifaceted character. To introduce the book, Dawson argued that ‘Culture, as its name suggests,’

is an artificial product. It is like a city that has been built up labouriously by the work of successive generations. It is the essence of culture that it is communicated, it is ... an accumulated capital of knowledge and a community of ‘folkways’ into which the individual has to be initiated. Hence it is clear that culture is inseparable from education, since education in the widest sense of the word is what the anthropologists term ‘enculturation,’ i.e., the process by which culture is handed on by the society and acquired by the individual.⁷³

According to Dawson, cultural studies that reflected the character of a society’s historical development were the mortar which held all of the components of education together. Far more than merely the accumulation of facts or specialization in a field, education is the means by which the sum of the society’s experience is transmitted. He believed that education should encourage ‘the harmonious development of every side of human nature, physical, moral, and intellectual, not dissimilar to the aims of humanistic studies.’⁷⁴ Such aims provide practical results. Dawson explained that a ‘common educational tradition creates a

⁷³ *CWE*, 7.

⁷⁴ *CWE*, 29.

common world of thought with common moral and intellectual values and a common inheritance of knowledge, and these are the conditions which make a culture conscious of its identity and give it a common memory and a common past.’⁷⁵

As for their ability to encounter the various facets of learning, Dawson observed how the medieval universities embodied this educational ideal, primarily because of the ‘intellectual and spiritual forces of Christian culture’ which were ‘strong enough to meet the challenge’ of the new Aristotelian ideas.⁷⁶ ‘Whatever we may think of the value of the content of medieval education, there can be no doubt of its cultural importance as an intellectual discipline that moulded the Western mind, and this was clearly recognized in the Middle Ages when *Studium*, or Learning, was ranked alongside of *Imperium* and *Sacerdotium* – Empire and Priesthood – as one of the three great powers that ruled the Christian world.’⁷⁷

The explosion of learning during the Renaissance provided the clearest example of the revival of classical ideals, even if its creative ability is often attributed to the re-introduction of Aristotelian ideas, and the decline of essentially religious medieval notions. ‘We should note,’ Dawson challenged, ‘that there is no justification here for the popular notion that the Renaissance was an irreligious neo-pagan movement. Certainly there was a strong current of rationalist and unorthodox ideas in fourteenth-century Italy, but if we are to believe Petrarch, the chief representatives of this tendency were to be found not among the humanists but among the philosophers and the scientists, above all the Averroists of Padua,

⁷⁵ *CWE*, 9.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

against whom so much of Petrarch's polemics are directed. The return to antiquity, as advocated by Petrarch himself and by his disciple Coluccio Salutati, the Chancellor of the Florentine Republic, and by Leonardo Bruni of Arezzo, was also a return to Christian antiquity and to the traditional alliance of classical and patristic studies.⁷⁸ Dawson believed that in order to be dynamic, a society's education must not be discriminatory but based upon all aspects of a society's intellectual inheritance and experience.⁷⁹ In spite of the reactions of some medieval leaders like St. Bernard, the medieval universities were successful in synthesising past knowledge with new learning. The result was an 'age of intense creative learning.'⁸⁰

It may be emphasized once again that Dawson's views were not the product of nostalgia or a glorification of the medieval era. He admitted that educational pursuits can be stifled through the failure to reform their methods. 'It has always been the curse of education,' he claimed, 'that it has been under the spell of the past in its methods and ideas. But today this past is not the past of the medieval schoolmen or the Renaissance humanists; it is the late nineteenth-century tradition of utilitarianism and secularism which is reducing modern education to a disintegrating mass of specialisms and vocational courses.'⁸¹ Dawson believed that in comparison to earlier forms of education in the West, modern education stands out as fundamentally parochial and pragmatic, so much so that it does not create a

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷⁹ *CWE*, 9-10.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 84. Cf. Christopher Dawson, 'Education and the Crisis of Christian Culture', 22; Christopher Dawson, 'The Study of Christian Culture as a Means of Education,' *Lumen Vitae*, 5 (March 1950): 173-174.

‘widening of the intellectual horizon,’ the ‘most valuable part of the old classical education.’⁸² Indeed, in line with Kant’s observations and in response to Freud, Dawson argued that the transcendent qualities of Western civilization’s religious beliefs were often the means by which a higher understanding of phenomena was accomplished. Rather than being symptomatic of neurosis or strictly the product of irrational forces in the unconscious, religion, or the *noumenal*, has played a vital role in the effort to understand the *phenomenal*.⁸³ To deny the religious aspects of education was to truncate pedagogical ideals that have provided an important dynamic to learning. Dawson’s ideal, as outlined in the last part of the book, was that Catholic universities and colleges should lead the way in an ‘integral education’ which would make the study of Christian culture central to post-secondary education.

Even before the publication of *The Crisis of Western Education* in 1961, Dawson’s commentary on modern education and the need for reforms were rather well known. ‘Dawson’s educational overtures,’ Schwartz noted, ‘attracted much commentary and even some implementation, but, despite his more extensive ambitions, most of this discussion was among Catholics,’ including ‘prominent Catholics such as John Courtney Murray and Thomas Merton.’⁸⁴ Schwartz notes, however, that many of Dawson’s observations and suggestions were embraced by non-Catholics, most notably the theologian Jaroslav Pelikan.⁸⁵

⁸² *CWE*, 94.

⁸³ Although Dawson does not make specific reference to Kant, it is clear that he, like Kant, was attempting to bridge the gap between empiricism and religious belief. See Roland N. Stromberg, *European Intellectual History Since 1789* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1994), 26-27.

⁸⁴ Schwartz, 1082.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1082.

The Crisis of Western Education was extensively reviewed. The responses provide extraordinary insights into the variety of opinions among Catholics in the United States about Catholic higher education and to what end the curriculum should be aimed. Among more conservative reviewers, the thesis of the book was readily accepted. One writer for *The Critic* called the book 'a penetrating analysis of education and culture in the Western world.' The reviewer concluded with an enthusiastic challenge that "Everyone interested in the improvement of Christian education and the preservation of Christian culture should read this outstanding book.' A reviewer for the journal *America* echoed *The Critic* and hailed it as 'Dawson's ... most impressive summons.' Another of the generation's formidable Christian historians, the non-Catholic Yale historian, Kenneth Scott Latourette acclaimed the book as a 'stimulating and provocative analysis of the crisis in Western education.'⁸⁶

Not all reviewers were ready to acclaim Dawson's vision for education, nor were they prepared to acknowledge his critique of many aspects of American education. Catholics on the left did not share many of their counterpart's positive responses to the book. More specifically, Allitt noted that the liberal Catholic Justus George Lawlor pointed out that 'Dawson had made a series of undocumented accusations about U. S. society as godless and conformist; a series of false analogies, comparing ordinary students' ideas, based on polling data, against Christian classics like Augustine's *City of God*; and many errors of fact.'⁸⁷ 'What's more,' Allitt continued, Lawlor reacted against Dawson's implications

⁸⁶The above reviews were printed on the leaves of the 1965 Image Books Edition.

⁸⁷See Justus George Lawler, review of *The Crisis of Western Education*, with rejoinder by John Mulloy and discussion, *Harvard Educational Review* 32 (Spring 1962): 214-227.

‘that earlier ages possessed a humaneness and integrity that our own lacked. But was that true, or was it mere romantic projection?’⁸⁸

Another critic of the book was the historian John Tracy Ellis. Several years earlier, Ellis had led a crusade to make radical changes to Catholic higher education. James Heft noted that in a momentous address to fellow Catholics ‘he set forth reasons to support Denis Brogan’s judgment that, despite abundant material wealth of American Catholics, their intellectual prestige was nowhere lower.’⁸⁹ ‘Among the reasons for this lack of intellectual achievement,’ Heft continues, ‘Ellis pointed out work ethic for study, an excessive multiplication of mediocre competing graduate schools at Catholic universities, and a ghetto mentality among Catholics.’⁹⁰ Months later, Ellis published what has been described as an ‘epoch-making’ article for the journal *Thought* to continue his controversial thesis.⁹¹ The response among Catholics was overwhelmingly supportive of Ellis’s arguments as a large number agreed that Catholic colleges and universities needed to bridge the academic gap between them and the secular universities.⁹²

Upon a consideration of the reviews of *The Crisis of Western Education*, the temptation is to reduce the opinions to those of the left versus the right. James

⁸⁸ Allitt, 270.

⁸⁹ James L. Heft, ‘John Tracy Ellis’ in Thomas C. Hunt, Ellis A. Joseph, and Ronald J. Nuzzi (eds.) *Catholic Schools in the United States*, Volumes One and Two (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 260.

⁹⁰ Heft, 260.

⁹¹ Allitt, 270. For more on Ellis’ perspectives on Catholicism and education in the 1950s see John Tracy Ellis, *American Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956) and ‘The Intellectual Life: Essays in Memory of John Tracy Ellis, Part One and Part Two,’ *U. S. Catholic Historian* 13, 1 and 2 (Winter 1995).

⁹² *Ibid.*, 270.

Hitchcock claims, however, that Catholic educators from both ends of the ideological spectrum were quick to reject Dawson's recommendations. 'The Catholic educational establishment,' he wrote, 'reacted in a largely negative way to Dawson's proposal, viewing it as unnecessary interference in a basically sound system. Some explicitly raised the question how the mere study of history, with its change and flux, could lead to unchanging truth. On the other side, self-consciously liberal Catholic educators accused Dawson of trying to impose a religious ghetto; they were urging that the Catholic curriculum be broadened to encompass the mainstream of modern secular culture.'⁹³

In 1995, lamenting her fellow Catholics failure to adopt her father's proposals, Scott noted that 'Catholic educationalists of the present *avant-garde* [have consigned] Christian culture to the dustbin of history.'⁹⁴ 'Dawson, himself,' Scott recalled, 'was amazed at the violence of the attacks on his proposal (mainly voiced in the columns of *Commonweal*) and wrote in reply that he certainly did not realize that "there was an influential body of Catholics who reacted to the words 'Christendom' and 'Christian culture' in the same way as a bull reacts to a red cloth.'"⁹⁵

Although Dawson had managed to write and publish in spite of his constant ill health, a series of strokes, the first of which occurred in December 1959, eventually forced him to admit his inability to continue working at such a rigorous pace. Yet, in spite of his reduced schedule, the strokes continued and in the winter of 1962 a particularly severe round of them would finally inhibit him from

⁹³Hitchcock, 117.

⁹⁴Scott, 'Vision and Legacy of Christopher Dawson,' 21.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 21.

carrying out his duties. On 2 April he resigned his position at Harvard and planned his return to England in July.

At a farewell dinner for Dawson and Valerie before their departure, Cardinal Cushing had nothing but praise for the shy English scholar. He wrote:

There are only a very few men in each generation of whom it may be said: 'He changed men's minds.' Tonight we honor just such a person. Christopher Dawson is one of those rare human spirits who stands back from the world in which he lives and takes the true measure of time and man.⁹⁶

After a lengthy forty minutes of accolades and congratulations, one of which included a telegram with an apostolic blessing from Pope John XXIII, Cushing concluded the evening by declaring,

I know of no figure in the Catholic world who could have brought that combination of personal reticence and intellectual excellence which has launched the Stillman Chair of Harvard University. Undoubtedly, in the years ahead, many great and impressive figures will be here, but each will look back with admiration and gratitude at the first occupant of this post who in his way, set the direction of its future.⁹⁷

Despite all the praise, Dawson's time in the United States produced little fruit in comparison to the harvest he had expected. For those outside the Church Dawson was appearing more polemical than ever. Changes within the historical profession made him appear as a relic from the nineteenth-century who still took Spengler seriously. Even some Catholics, as noted, were critical of these assertions, seeing them as counter-productive to their own intellectual development. Under increased scrutiny by the historical academy and among his fellow Catholics, Dawson's general perspective – from history to Christian culture

⁹⁶ An address by Cardinal Cushing as quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 202.

⁹⁷ Cardinal Cushing as quoted in Scott, *Historian*, 203.

to education – was superseded by a more relativistic and pluralistic understanding of the world's history.

There is an aspect of Dawson's hope that has been validated, for it is in the United States where his views have fared most successfully to this day.⁹⁸ Yet he highly overestimated the willingness of Catholic institutions in America to embrace his vision of the history of Christian culture, and his recommendations for Catholic higher education to place it at the centre of their curriculum.

Unfortunately for Dawson, Mulloy and the other admirers with whom he had contact were not representative of trends within the intellectual life of American Catholicism. Rather, the trends in American Catholic education were perhaps better represented by 'new breed' reformers such as the historian John Tracy Ellis and theologian Michael Novak, both of whom dismissed what they believed were the counter-progressive ideals of 'old-school' conservatives.⁹⁹ Clearly, Dawson had entered a U.S. Catholic environment at a time of unprecedented reforms in education at Catholic Universities. Unfortunately for him, the reforms attempted to scuttle the type of education he was promoting. Thus, by the time he arrived in Cambridge, Massachusetts to begin his Professorship at Harvard University in 1958, his analysis of the crisis of Western Civilization and his recommendations for the renewal of the study of Christian culture were, for the most part, already dismissed by many Catholic educators.¹⁰⁰ When ill health forced him to return prematurely to England in 1962, he had the dubious distinction of being a highly

⁹⁸See Franz König, 'Europe's Spiritual Adventure', *The Tablet*, (February 2000): 1.

⁹⁹Allitt, 270-271. It should be noted, however, that it was not merely an issue between liberals and conservatives. Indeed, Dawson's views were as easily dismissed by conservatives as they were by liberals.

¹⁰⁰Hitchcock, 114-115.

regarded scholar whose notions could be easily dismissed in the light of the academic expectations of a new generation.

Part Eight

The Final Years: 1963 to 1970

A Quiet Departure

According to Christina Scott, doctors gave Dawson eight months to live in 1962. In fact he would live another eight relatively healthy years. There was little activity in the three years after his return to England as he was unable to write after his debilitating stroke in 1962. Even talking was difficult for him. There was, however, a tremendous resource for future books in his yet to be published lectures which he delivered during his time at Harvard. It was only in a matter of time that they would be edited and published by Sheed and Ward in two volumes: *The Dividing of Christendom* and *The Formation of Christendom*. in 1965 and 1967.¹

The Dividing of Christendom was a collection of lectures from the last two years of Dawson's Harvard tenure. The lectures from the first two years would be published two years later as *The Formation of Christendom*.² Douglas Horton, the former Dean of Harvard Divinity School and the man instrumental in the school's

¹ Christopher Dawson, *The Dividing of Christendom* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), hereafter *DOC*; Christopher Dawson, *The Formation of Christendom* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), hereafter *FOC*. According to Hitchcock, there are many of his lectures from this period that remain unpublished. See Hitchcock, 117.

² Why the two books were published in this order is unknown. One possibility, and it is merely speculative, could be that it was a matter of pedagogy for Dawson and Sheed and Ward. The origins of Christian divisions and disunity must first be understood before the common elements found in the formation of Christendom could be fully appreciated. Had they been published in chronological order, the themes in *The Formation of Christendom* might have been underestimated.

choosing Dawson, introduced the book with glowing praise for its “erudite” author. Horton proceeded to include a personal aspiration that the book might foster closer ties among all Christians as they begin to understand their common heritage and the forces that led to the divisions of the sixteenth century. “This [book] cannot but be of special interest to [Protestants], since it tells their story as a wise and honest Catholic understands it and so initiates dialogue at the highest level. In this way the book becomes part of the very history with which it deals. It becomes an instrument with which to meet and reduce those divisions it describes. In the ecumenical era into which we all trust are entering, there can be no substitute for mutual understanding: sheer acts and the common appraisal of them must provide the foundation on which to build better relations among Christians – and this book makes a telling contribution to that end.”³

The Formation of Christendom includes some excellent insight into the approach Dawson took to teaching the history of Christianity as a Catholic in a divinity school dominated by a Protestant heritage and population. More generally, it also helps expose Dawson approach to ecumenical issues near the end of his life before the Second Vatican Council had been called. Although there is very little in the way of new thought in this book, it is still a valuable window into both these themes.

Dawson believed he had reason to be optimistic about the role America would play in global Christian unity. “I think it possible”, he proclaimed, “to say that in this country and in this century we have reached a decisive point in the movement towards Christian unity.”⁴ In Europe, the divisions between Catholics and Protestants have a long and troubled history. Differences in theology were

³Douglas Horton, Foreword to *The Dividing of Christendom*, 7-8.

⁴*DOC*, 16.

compounded by national allegiances, and thus severing former lines of unity. According to Dawson, then, national differences had distorted, and indeed concealed, the common patrimony of Protestants and Catholics. Much to support his optimism, divisions along these lines were much less prevalent in America, allowing for more opportunity to recognize this common patrimony through the study of Christian culture. Dawson explained:

It offers an opportunity such as has never existed in the world before for Christians to meet and understand one another. Without such an understanding there can be no hope for a return to Christian unity. But it is not enough for Christians to meet one another in an atmosphere of good will. What is most necessary is an understanding in depth, and this cannot be achieved without a serious and persistent effort of study and research.⁵

Of course, the most important events to occur during this final phase of Dawson's life was the Second Vatican Council. Unfortunately, he was able to write very little about this milestone in the history of the Catholic Church. What we do know of some of his initial reaction is from his daughter. She wrote:

Although, on account of his illness, Christopher was unable to attend Mass for some years before his death, he was well aware of the changes that were taking place and he deplored them. In a letter to Edward Watkin he wrote: 'I hate the changes in the liturgy and even the translations are so bad.' This letter, written in the 1960s but undated, referred to the earlier changes, the tip of the iceberg, before the present *Novus Ordo* was introduced in 1970. He had always been deeply attached to the Latin liturgy and the old Roman Mass and this letter is evidence that he had not changed his views.⁶

On May 1970, Dawson suffered a heart attack and contracted pneumonia soon afterwards.⁷ It is fitting, perhaps, that the description of his last days be recounted by his daughter. She wrote,

⁵DOC, 16.

⁶Scott, *Historian*, 206.

⁷*Ibid.*, 207.

Chauncey Stillman ... came to see him shortly before he died and Christopher was able to smile at him and say: 'Good-bye Chauncey.' Edward Watkin also came to see his oldest and greatest friend for the last time. When he had left, Christopher said to his nurse, Sister Mary: 'You know he made me a Catholic.' On Trinity Sunday he sank into a coma from which he never rallied except for one brief and remarkable moment which Sister Mary has recalled:

'All of a sudden he opened his eyes and staring at the painting of the crucifixion, which was on the wall at the foot of his bed, he had a beautiful smile and his eyes were wide open. He then said: "This is Trinity Sunday. I see it all and it is beautiful." He then returned to the coma never to regain consciousness.'

He died the next day, 25th of May, on the feast of St. Bede, with his family and also his sister present. At the moment of his death, Fr Michael Ryan, the parish priest, who had already administered the Last Rites of the Catholic Church to him, happened to call in and gave him his blessing. The funeral took place at Budleigh Salterton and he was buried in Burnsall churchyard in Yorkshire, next to his parents' grave.⁸

⁸Scott, *Historian*, 207-208. Scott goes on to say that his wife Valerie lived for four more years, dying on 28th September 1974 after a short illness. (p.208).

Conclusion

A Quiet Legacy, 1970 to the Present

Since Dawson's death in 1970, several of his unpublished works have been put into print: *The Gods of Revolution* (1972), his incomplete work on the French Revolution; *Christianity in East and West* (1981), an expanded version of *The Movement of World Revolution*; and *Christianity and European Culture* (1998), a collection of essays edited by Gerald Russello.¹ The aging historian Arnold Toynbee wrote the introduction to *The Gods of Revolution*, and in spite of their differences of opinion about history, Toynbee's respect for Dawson was obvious. He wrote,

Dawson's work has always been both original and sincere. His thoughts and feelings are always his own. They are never taken by him at second hand and this quality makes his treatment of a subject rewarding. However often the particular subject may have been dealt with by his predecessors, Dawson's handling throws new light on it. Originality and sincerity do not always go together. There are writers who strain after novelty self-consciously. Dawson tells his readers straightforwardly what he truly feels and thinks. His religion, and his views of life and of history are definite. At the same time, he has a sympathetic understanding for people whose outlooks differ from his own.²

¹Christopher Dawson, *The Gods of Revolution* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1972); *Christianity in East and West* (La Salle, Illinois: Sherwood, Sugden & Company, 1981); Gerald J. Russello (ed.), *Christianity and European Culture: Selections from the Work of Christopher Dawson* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998).

²Arnold Toynbee, 'Introduction to *The Gods of Revolution*', ix.

There is a level of irony in the publisher's choice to have Toynbee write the introduction; Toynbee, in his eighty-fifth year, and long past the peak of his popularity, honouring a friend who was already forgotten by a new generation of historians who distrusted the so called 'meta-historians.' Indeed, the sun had set on the generation of Toynbee and Dawson.

John Morrill, the well-respected historian of seventeenth-century England, observed that Dawson's historiography was marginalised after his death as a result of 'the rise of revisionism in the 1970s' which reacted 'against Marxist and Marxist-tainted historiographies with their strong teleologies.' The expectations of historians since this decade 'has led to an ever-greater *pointillisme* and (more respectably) to a concern less with the vertical dimension of historical study (how the past came to inform the present) than with the horizontal dimension of the past (why the past was as it was).'³ Yet even before 1970 and as early as 1950 this changing environment was identifiable, leaving the historiography of Dawson and other metahistorians not only unfashionable but categorically rejected as quasi-historical scholarship.

Although Dawson had his admirers outside the Church, he had a difficult time attracting those who were not Catholics but who were still ready to listen to his point of view. Indeed his marginalization was not unlike that expressed by Eric Hobsbawm, the Marxist historian and former leader of the British Communist party, who complained that his admirers bore much of the responsibility for his 'ghettoisation' as a scholar. Hobsbawm writes,

What troubled my vanity was rather the fear of a mere ghetto reputation, such as that from which figures prominent inside another characteristic twentieth-century cultural ghetto, the Roman Catholic community in

³ Morrill, Introduction to *Eternity in Time*, 4.

Britain, have so often found it difficult, even impossible, to escape. G. K. Chesterton, the dimensions of whose talent have been concealed from non-Catholics by the very closeness of his association with the Church, is a good example. Getting good reviews from friendly critics was not the problem. The test of success was to get them from the neutral and hostile ones.⁴

The following generation, if they knew of Dawson's work at all, proclaimed him a 'Catholic' historian and 'apologist,' thereby implying that Dawson's assertions about the theological character of the historical process, and of the exalted place of Catholicism in Western cultural development, simply too polemical to be taken seriously.⁵ Comparing Dawson and his counterpart in the United States, Carleton Hayes, Patrick Allitt explains:

Both had to face the accusation that their Catholicism had led them to distort aspects of historical interpretation. They were powerless to alter the fact that most practicing historians were not fellow Catholics and that the standards and canons of the historical profession were strictly this-worldly, based on secular scientific ideals. In this situation they disagreed with their contemporaries on the nature of human life itself and the meaning of existence. For them the tension between the mundane and the supernatural worlds, though always kept under close control in their interpretation, never disappeared, and it lent their work an air of apologetics to unconvinced readers.⁶

Of course, Dawson, Hayes, and Hobsbawm were not alone. The historical academy's mistrust of metahistory and broad, sweeping studies of the past has been one of the best-defined characteristics of the historical academy in the twenty-first century. It is therefore easy to see why his scholarship has been pushed to the periphery of twentieth-century historiography. Even the following generation of Catholics, those 'heirs and successors of the makers of Europe' all of whom he believed had a 'special responsibility' have, to a great extent, forgotten

⁴Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (London: Allen Lane, 2002).

⁵See Quinn, 'The Catholic Idea of History,' 70-71.

⁶Allitt, 274.

him.⁷ Still less are his claims and suggestions about Western civilization taken seriously by them, a fact lamented by the few who remain devoted to his diagnosis of the West and his recommendations for its future

In contrast with the detractors, there is a small but devoted number of scholars who view Dawson as a modern-day prophet.⁸ Much of this favourable scholarship is a product of a 'mini-revival' of Dawson's scholarship.⁹ Much of the material from this period reveals a collective lament over the lack of contemporary appreciation of Dawson's achievement within the historical profession. In a recent article, Dermot Quinn of Seton Hall University blames 'the historical profession itself' as 'a quasi-feudal community with its own strange structures of honour, obedience, servility, and unpaid labour.'¹⁰ Not all laments for Dawson are as passionately driven as that of Quinn but they are as resolute. Gerald Russello, for example, writes that 'Dawson is one of those historians everyone should read but few actually do.'¹¹ Many of these writers point out that during his lifetime he was praised for his 'original minded and sincere minded' thinking, and believe that this

⁷ Christopher Dawson, 'Editorial Note', *The Dublin Review*, no. 207 (1940): 1.

⁸ For some of the most extreme examples see Link Byfield, 'Upon Our Dark Horizon Lie the First Faint Promises of a New Dawn', *Alberta Report/Newsmagazine*, Vol. 20, Issue 33 (1993): 2; Virginia Byfield, 'The Half of the Story they Don't Want to Tell', *Alberta Report/Newsmagazine*, Vol. 21, Issue 45 (1994). For a more tame example see Gerald J. Russello, 'The Relevance of Christopher Dawson', *First Things*, Issue 122 (April 2002): 46. The same lack of judgement that comes with too high of a regard for Dawson can even be identified in very good scholarship such as Jonathon Reyes' dissertation. See the 'Introduction and Review of Literature' of the present study.

⁹ Franz König, 'Europe's Spiritual Adventure', *The Tablet* (February 2000): 1.

¹⁰ Dermot Quinn, Introduction of the latest republication *Dynamics of World History*. My gratitude is expressed to Dermot Quinn for sending me a draft of this introduction before it was actually published.

¹¹ Russello, 'The Relevance of Christopher Dawson,' 46.

should somehow guarantee Dawson a place in the historical academy of the future.¹²

Although I do not share the same passionate enthusiasm for Dawson's arguments as many of these scholars, I am convinced – and on this point I agree whole heartedly with Jonathon Ryes – that he, as well as his legion of works, has been unfairly assessed by admirers and detractors. Indeed the following question needs to be answered: is it possible to find a balanced assessment between these polar opposites of Dawson's contribution and the value of his scholarship, or is one necessarily forced to conclude that Dawson was either a 'prophet' or merely a historical curiosity with little relevance to the present generation?

In recent years, several historians have attempted to assess Dawson's contribution and his place within the greater context of twentieth-century historiography. Patrick Allitt writes that 'aspects of historical study which Dawson helped pioneer are now commonplace among British and American historians. The concept of culture, in the anthropological sense, was a novelty among historians when Dawson began to use it in the 1920s but has been indispensable to the social historians of the last three decades.'¹³ Although Allitt admits that these historians have 'used it to very different ends,' such an observation does reveal Dawson's prescience. Like Allitt, John Morrill has been careful to give Dawson his due.

Morrill writes:

¹² Arnold Toynbee to Christopher Dawson, 17 Dec. 1954, quoted in Schwartz, 'Third Spring', 732. Both Adam Schwartz and Dermot Quinn gave several quotes in their works on Dawson and the praise that was given him. The following quote is generally representative of how Dawson was viewed as a Catholic scholar and writer during such difficult times in the 1930s and 1940s. Barbara Ward wrote to Dawson: 'there is no one to whom I remain so fundamentally and profoundly grateful. No one has so influenced the way I think and the way I think and the way I look at politics and social affairs and no one has given me such a solid sense of the spiritual and constitutional basis of freedom...I owe it to you that I have been able to keep my mind clear and my faith untroubled.' (Barbara Ward to Dawson, 20 Oct. 1954)

¹³ Allitt, 274.

He was a scholar who worked in an age which privileged certain kinds of evidence as 'historical and downgraded, even refused to deal with, 'literary' texts and cultural artefacts and images as other than adornments to the product of rigorous historical analysis and exegesis. This more than anything has kept him out of the pantheon of great historians in the eyes of the 'profession' – at least in the United Kingdom.¹⁴

Clearly, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the narrow boundaries of historical evidence have been extended, confirming Dawson's expectations.

Morrill concludes that 'historians have reached the position he was always in.'¹⁵

Dawson's historiography is not without its problems. First, very few of his books contain a critical apparatus such as footnotes or endnotes. The absence of this vital aspect of historical scholarship lends his work, fairly or unfairly, to accusations of amateur historiography, and therefore gives it a certain polemic quality, a characteristic which led Stephen Baxter to assert that 'Dawson took positions rather than doing primary research.'¹⁶ While it is true that Dawson's books often stray from historical analysis and include some apologetic fervour, Baxter's observation is too general and therefore misleading. In the latest edition of *The Making of Europe*, Alexander Murray of University College, Oxford concluded that despite the age of the book, 'the historical data in [*The Making of Europe*] are overwhelmingly the same as would be accepted today,' even if Murray himself has reservations about some of Dawson's conclusions and use of terms.¹⁷

¹⁴ Morrill, 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁶ Stephen B. Baxter, 'Review of 'Rooms of katholiek: De opvattingen van Christopher Dawson over kultuur en religie', by Eduard van den Brink', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 80 Issue 2 (April 1975): 369. This may be part of the reason why Dawson is often ignored as an historian. About this neglect, John Morrill writes: 'it is striking that [Dawson's] work is discussed in the *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature* (as 'among the ranks of distinguished historians who are also men of letters') but not in several recent biographical dictionaries of history and historians.' Morrill, 2.

¹⁷ Murray, xx.

The most obvious problem for current academic expectations is Dawson's defence of metahistory. Yet it is important to note as well that critics of his historiography have exaggerated his classic 'metahistorical' claims by only concentrating on these aspects of his thought. Their unfamiliarity with all aspects of Dawson's ideas lead them to assume that he can be simply categorized with other metahistorians. Although he painted the past with broad strokes, the main difference between Dawson's 'metahistory' and the meta-histories criticized by Popper and Bullock, as was noted in Part 6 of the present study, is that Dawson did not believe that the study of history could produce predictions of the future. The result, as Stephen Tonsor has noted, is that 'Dawson ... offers us no modern City of God. Nor [does he provide] an historical *Summa* in the sense of the work of Spengler and Toynbee.'¹⁸ The exposition of his own system is tentative and at times uncertain [but] his criticism of other systems is nothing short of brilliant.'¹⁹

Dawson's enthusiasm for a scientific sociology is yet another problem. If the scientific claims for sociology were in question during Dawson's lifetime, they are most certainly doubted today. Much like the study of history in the past forty years, sociology, as it was originally conceived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, has become more interpretive and specialized, leaving grand schemas behind. 'Within sociology [in the 1970s],' Peter Novick writes, 'though a positivist orientation remained dominant, currents either explicitly or implicitly discussed the social world in 'textual' and 'constructivist' ways; treated reality as something 'made' rather than 'found.'²⁰ Symbolic interactionist,

¹⁸ Stephen Tonsor, 'History and the God of the Second Chance,' *Modern Age* (Spring 1958): 200.

¹⁹ Tonsor, 200; Reyes, 72.

²⁰ Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 548.

phenomenological, structuralist, feminist, exchange theory, and postmodernist schools replaced the positivist school that influenced Dawson. The scientific approaches that continued, such as socio-biology, were presented as newly driven research paradigms, based on new findings, by contrast to which the scientific theories of the early twentieth century seemed 'metaphysical.'²¹ Like many of his other observations, however, his insistence on the spiritual and the religious as a transcendent part of any sociological picture creates a certain level of ambiguity about how far he believed in the 'scientific' nature of sociology. Indeed, this ambiguity leads to further difficulty assessing Dawson's idea of history.

Both Jonathon Reyes and Stephen Tonsor have argued that Dawson's idea of history is full of tension and creates a certain amount of confusion because he 'never settled on whether to be an idealist or a materialist.'²² 'On the one hand,' Reyes writes, '[Dawson] believed that material forces contributed to the formation of cultures and historical events. On the other hand, he believed that spiritual forces were also at work, human and divine.'²³ But is this dichotomy (one which is highly exaggerated by Tonsor and Reyes, since Dawson never would have settled on being a materialist, given his commitment to metaphysics) a serious problem for those who are looking for value in Dawson's historiography and philosophical perspective? Most certainly it is not since Dawson rejected both, and sought a middle path between the two.

Dawson rejected notions of a strictly materialist history embraced by Marxist historians, even to the point of overlooking important aspects necessary to

21 My thanks to Dr. Ricardo Duchesne of the University of New Brunswick for a brief, but insightful lesson on the history of sociology in the latter half of the twentieth century.

²² Reyes, 73; See also Tonsor, 199-201.

²³ Reyes, 73.

historiography such as economics and science.²⁴ Yet John Morrill notes that '[Dawson] knew that social and economic experience conditioned what one came to believe and how one came to act.'²⁵ The tension between material factors and the spiritual quality of history was not problematic for Dawson because he, not unlike Hegel, knew that such tension was vital for any study of humanity's past and for hope in the future. Human beings are part of and subject to material factors, a condition that makes material history vitally important to the study of history. Yet for Dawson, there are components of the human condition and existence that cannot be reduced to material factors. Questions about meaning and purpose are timeless, and as long as 'wonder' remains at the heart of inquiry, a strict materialist history cannot accurately demonstrate the complexity of human experience and culture. Thus, it is the myths of history, those imprints of the spiritual behind human experience and history that impacted Dawson in his youth, which are vital to the explanation and expansion of the human consciousness.

It is the mixture of spiritual and material factors that make Dawson's idea of history extremely difficult to explain. Essentially, he understood history as a Platonic drama in which the opaque higher reality is slowly actualized in time, an epic of desires against ends where hope is the restorer of faith, and unity is the goal. For, as he wrote in 1938, 'the true progress of history is a mystery which is fulfilled in failure and suffering and which will only be revealed at the end of time. The work of divine restoration and regeneration ... is the true end of history.'²⁶

²⁴ Baxter, 369.

²⁵ Morrill, 3.

²⁶ Christopher Dawson, 'The Kingdom of God and History' in Gerald J. Russello (ed.), *Christianity and European Culture: Selections from the Works of Christopher Dawson* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 212.

Without this hope for restoration, the materialist philosophy is overemphasized to create an essentially meaningless history, an unacceptable conclusion given the complexity of life and the human consciousness. Dawson was aware of the movement towards this solipsism during his lifetime, but was nevertheless optimistic that a new spirit based on timeless principles would restore faith in humanity's future in the struggle for peace and unity. The study of the past, and the spiritual impulse at the heart of it, can, according to Dawson, be a means to continue this struggle to attain these ends.

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¹ Claude Locas was the first to compile a comprehensive list of Dawson's publication. See *Harvard Theological Review*, 66(2), (April 1973): 177-206. Locas' bibliography was updated by Christina Scott and appears at the end of her biography on Dawson. See Scott, *Historian*, 247-259. Wherever possible, I have included works that I have across that were not included in Scott's bibliography. Many of the editions I have made are reviews of other historian's works that were not included in either Locas' or Scott's bibliographies.

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